"Loose Ends" — RICHARD SALE

WALTER C. BROWN – THEODORE ROSCOE – G. A. SHAFTEL

Short Stories

Twice A Month

March 25th

25c

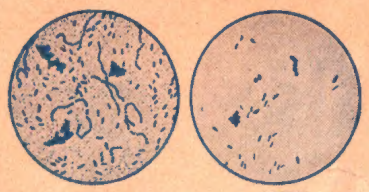
The day the old Uncle went to war—mark it well!

THE RAID THEY STOPPED

A long novelette by

A. A. CAFFREY

NOTE HOW LISTERINE GARGLE REDUCED GERMS



BEFORE AFTER

The two drawings illustrate height of range in germ reductions on mouth and throat surfaces in test cases before and after gargling Listerine Antiseptic. Fifteen minutes after gargling, germ reductions up to 96.7% were noted; and even one hour after, germs were still reduced as much as 80%.

A Cold Is An Infection, Treat It As Such With Germ-Killing Action

Tests showed that Listerine Antiseptic reduced surface germs as much as 96.7% even 15 minutes after the gargle; up to 80% one hour later.

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Here's one reason why, we believe.

Listerine Antiseptic reaches way back on throat surfaces to kill millions of the "secondary invaders" which, many noted laryngologists say, are responsible for so many of a cold's miserable symptoms.

We feel that Listerine's quick germ-killing action explains its amazing test record against colds during a period of 10 years.

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BIGGEST AND BEST—TWICE A MONTH

Stories

latest stories—no reprints

March 25th, 1942

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Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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A strange man in Los Angeles, known as "The Voice of Two Worlds," tells of astonishing experiences in far-off and mysterious Tibet, often called the land of miracles by the few travelers permitted to visit it. Here he lived among the lamas, mystic priests of the temple. "In your previous lifetime," a very old lama told him, "you lived here, a lama in this temple. You and I were boys together. I lived on, but you died in youth, and were reborn in England. I have been expecting your return."

The young Englishman was amazed as he looked around the temple where he was believed to have lived and died. It seemed uncannily familiar, he appeared to know every nook and corner of it; yet—at least in this lifetime—he had never been there before. And mysterious was the set of circumstances that had brought him. Could it be a case of reincarnation, that strange belief of the East that souls return to earth again and again, living many lifetimes?

Because of their belief that he had formerly been a lama in the temple, the lamas welcomed the young man with open arms and taught him rare mysteries and long-hidden practices, closely guarded for three thousand years by the sages, which have enabled many to perform amazing feats. He says that the system often leads to almost unbelievable improvement in power of mind, can be used to achieve brilliant business and professional success as well as great happiness. The young man himself later became a noted explorer and geographer, a successful publisher of maps and atlases of the Far East, used throughout the world.

"There is in all men a sleeping giant of mindpower," he says. "When awakened, it can make man capable of surprising feats, from the prolonging of youth to success in many other worthy endeavors." The system is said by many to promote improvement in health; others tell of increased bodily strength, courage and poise.

"The time has come for this long-hidden system to be disclosed to the Western world," declares the author, and offers to send his amazing 9000 word treatise—which reveals many startling results—to sincere readers of this publication, free of cost or obligation. For your free copy, address the Institute of Mentalphysics, 213 South Hobart Blvd., Dept. 92L, Los Angeles, Calif. Readers are urged to write promptly, as only a limited number of the free treatises have been printed.

THE RAID THEY STOPPED

By ANDREW A. CAFFREY

Author of Many Stories of Loose Lip Lock; but None So Exciting as This

CHAPTER I

THE DAY—MARK IT WELL

THAT black Sunday afternoon when the East Coast heard that Jap bombs were dropping through the soft Hawaiian dawn on Pearl Harbor, Federal Proving Ground's radio began calling all hands back to the post.

Captain Call, officer in charge of Test Hangar, was first man of his own department to arrive in that loft office—the loft that overlooks the mighty acreage of test hangar's busy floor. In short order came those others, the test pilots and flight-test observers. And the radio that spoke on Captain Call's desk told them why they were there. Told them all they wanted to know—plus a great plenty of stuff they didn't want to hear. Hard-to-take stuff.

Loose Lip Lock, that star motor mac and all-around airplane man, came in.

For once Loose Lip wasn't talking. He had even come up the long outer stairway quietly. He had opened the door without his usual burst of speed. Then he had crossed the wooden floor as though tiptoeing through a church and arrived at an awed stop behind the silent, listening wall of backs.

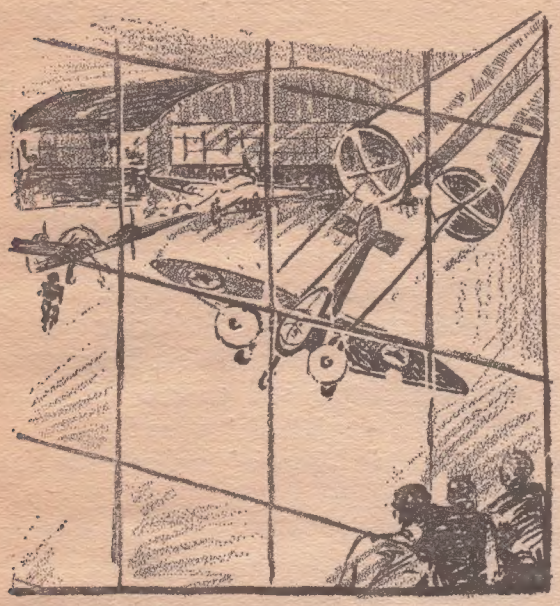
Standing there, sucking on a Sunday cigar's butt, Loose Lip stared down at his boss—Cap Call. Call seemed sunk just a little lower than the others. And Loose Lip waited for a break in the radio newscast before he chanced his first peep.

"Don't let it get you down, Cap," he mumbled. "They're dropping the first. Our gang will close the book."

Captain Call humped to his feet and fell to a violent pacing of that office. And his voice shook when he spoke.

"Dropped the first!" he said. *"Did* you say it, Lockie! Did you say it!

"To hell with the little matter of who dropped the first. The only thing that matters is that they dropped. And they dropped on Hickam Field. They dropped on Luke Field. They killed our men at those two spots, Lockie. At Hickam and at Luke. *Our* gang. "Yes, sir, they dropped on the Pearl and they dropped right here in this office. They dropped on you—on all of us."



Man, This East Coast Is Hotter Than You Think—and with That Ship, if Your Guns Don't Get the Enemy Gunners, the Surprise Should Kill 'Em!

Then the radio said that a second wave of Jap ships was coming in over Barber's Point and that the anti-aircraft guns were meeting them this time. Then the radiocast said the bombs were dropping on Waikiki; and each of those test men winced—for each had served his tour of duty on Wheeler, Luke or Hickam, and bombs on helpless, gay Waikiki were like bombs on a kindergarten.

"God, does this hit close to home!" mused Test Pilot Hill, newest of Captain Call's crew, for only a month before had he been on Hickam.

"It'll never be closer to home, Hill," Test Pilot Murphy said. "They've hit us where we live. We live wherever there's an Air Forces man with his chest against a bar or an Air Forces mac sound asleep under a wing."

"Air Forces macs asleep?" Loose Lip questioned. "Didn't one of them radio reports tell as how three hunnerd an' fifty air macs—an' maybe fliers—was killed on Hickam?"

Nobody seemed to answer Loose Lip's question, for a new broadcast was reporting naval craft afire in West Loch, Middle Loch, in Hanaloa Lake and all over Pearl Harbor. "They're in force, and no damned fooling!" said Call. "How in hell could it happen! Are we wiped out there? How about that, Lieutenant Hill? You saw the islands last."

"They won't be wiped out there, sir," young Hill said. "They'll never be wiped out. We'll never be wiped out—any place."

"Helpless!" Call roared. "We men here are so damned helpless. Come on, Lockie—why don't you do something?"

Loose Lip Lock said, "Cap, give me a knife—an' a Jap—an' I'll show you a party."

"It's all one-sided, Pacific-sided," Captain Call growled. "And we're too far away. Too far away and safe. That's hell."

"Don't be too sure, Cap," said Loose Lip. "When I was a young gink—in that other war—us guys used to kick like hell 'cause we was stationed at Issoudun. That

was one hunnerd miles behind the front. We wanted the front. 'Don't be so anxious,' our ol' top-kick used to tell us. 'Maybe the Huns'll bring that front to you.'

"An'," Loose Lip went on, "the ol' top-kick was right. One night the dam' Jerries did bring a raid to us."

The radiocast said that a battleship had gone down in Pearl Harbor, then that a destroyer had blown up, and that the Naval Station was burning. . . . Then again that report about three-hundred-fifty dead on Hickam Field.

And the phone on Captain Call's desk was kind enough to break that death freeze with its sharp ringing.

CHAPTER II

FEDERAL GET HOT

THE phone clicked and buzzed a few times after Captain Call picked it up. That meant he was being cut in on the official long-distance. He cupped his hand over the receiver, glanced across his desk at the watching circle and mumbled, "Washington. It's Operations calling.

"Oh, hello, Major Trump," Captain Call then said, speaking to that officer in Operations, Washington. And Captain Call, at the same time, slipped his watchers a wink. Major Trump—not so long ago "Lieutenant" Trump—was well known to the men of that test department. Fact is, Major Trump had at one time been a member of Captain Call's crew. And the others of that tough crew were still very much divided on the matter of Major Trump's weight and worth. Which is to say that Trump, though a high card in Air Forces now, hadn't always been an ace among his fellow flyers.

Loose Lip, speaking low, mumbled. "Ten to one Trump's due in here on Federal Provin'. Chances are he's comin' back to glom the stuff I forgot to learn him when he was here."

Lighting a new cig, Pilot Murphy mumbled through cupped hands and asked, "He a pal of yours, Lock?"

"Dam' tootin', Irish," Loose Lip answered. "Me an' the big boy are like that" —like the well-known entwined fingers— "an' you gents's just sore 'cause Trump got away to a faster climb than the rest of you."

"Damned if he didn't," Pilot Mowat agreed. "Yes, sir, Loose Lip, it was here today and gone tomorrow. And when he went, he sure did zoom. A loused-up lieut one day, then Presto, and Trump's a major."

"The guy's there," Loose Lip enthused —though, in the past, he, too, had had his troubles with, and doubts about, Trump.

Meantime, Captain Call, having done all the listening and very little talking, ended the conversation and pushed the phone aside with a subdued "Whew!"

"Are they droppin' somewheres else, Cap?" Loose Lip asked.

"And how!" said Call. "Gentlemen, what I tell you now, here with these doors and windows closed, must remain exclusively with you. We're on the schedule. This coast is. New York is."

"The Axis schedule?" asked Murphy. "The butchers' list?"

"What else?" said Call. "Major Trump says that the European listening posts have uncovered a plan that will make the Pacific spread look like a harmless rash. Now, as I've warned you, we're in on something that, perhaps, not even the White House knows."

"You know us, Cap," Loose Lip mumbled. "How bad?"

"Bad," Captain Call repeated and emphasized. "Unless," he added, "U. S. forces can head 'em off."

"Who? Head who off?" nearly every man in the office asked, almost as one.

"The Nazi air arms — mostly the big boats," Captain Call made known. "Hitler and the fat boy—if the fat boy is still in the picture—are all set to throw suicide raids in this direction. Yes, sir, believe it

or not, they're going to toss the whole wad on the blanket and roll the dice."

"Man!" exploded Loose Lip Lock. "Will Uncle Sam fade that play! But hell, Cap—why tell us? We poor test-field dopes won't get no chance to throw punches in this party—if it comes off. An' 'specially us civilian johns—the observers an' us macs. Guys that sleep under wings, like Irish says."

CAPTAIN CALL was reaching for things on his big desk. He was in no kidding mood, but he did remind Loose Lip, "Don't forget what your old top-kick told you—they might bring the front this way far enough to make you sit up and take notice.

"Maybe close enough to make you take part. Lockie, my old battler of the long workbench, it looks as though we've been too complacent, too damned certain that it couldn't happen here!"

Slim Rand, chief mac in test hangar, came in; and close on his heels was Harry Copinger, civilian mechanic in charge of Storage hangar — the big shelter under whose great roof certain inactive ships were usually housed.

"Just the men we're waiting for," Captain Call said. "Slim, when your macs report in, you'll hold them ready for special detail.

"Harry," he then said to Copinger, "you'll call Maintenance for a working detail and clear everything out of Storage."

Captain Call then faced Loose Lip when he spoke again.

"We're in on this party from the opener," he then made known. "Operations has chosen our old stamping ground—instead of Mitchel Field or any of the other interceptor bases—for the big get-away."

"What get-away? Whose get-away, Captain?" Murphy asked.

"Major Trump is bringing in a flight of Bushmasters.

"Bushmasters?" The Orr Aircraft jobs that were too dam' good for our tests, eh?" Test-Flight Observer Kinney, the hard guy, growled. Kinney was still sore because of the supposed slight.

Captain Call grinned. "Don't be that way, Kinney," he said. "The Bushmasters are the only interceptor jobs that stand absolutely a secret. It took a lot of hard work to keep them that way, too."

"Dam' right, Cap," Loose Lip agreed. "Hard Guy, why don't you go some place an' die? Look, guy, they hasn't been a model tested on this field durin' the past ten years that hasn't showed up, within a month, in every German an' Dago airplane mag'zene. An' you make a noise when we manage to keep somethin' in the fambly!"

"The guy with the loose lip is right—for once," said Test Pilot Murphy. "And from what I hear—the other guy is welcome to handle these Bushmaster fireballs. What I collect, they have smoke on 'em. Even before they burn out their dam' power units through too much super-supercharged speed."

"They're hot," Captain Call agreed. "I've had the official test reports on the Bushmaster. Truth is, they're on file with the rest of the gold out in the ground at Fort Knox."

"What's it got, Captain?" Test Pilot Hill asked.

"Fire-position certainty, for one thing, plus other eye-opening items," said Call. "But you'll have to wait till you see them. And it won't be long"—he checked his wrist-watch with the official time on the office clock—"for things are going to happen fast. Major Trump and his Bushmasters will be in the air by now, coming from there to here. And there is far inland, not Washington, for the major was talking through Operations, not from."

Harry Copinger remained just long enough to hear a radio voice repeat that serious, crippling damage had been done at Pearl Harbor then started for the door, saying, "Best that I get the ball rolling.

My small part toward knocking their bloody ears down."

Turning to Slim Rand, his hangar boss, Loose Lip Lock unintentionally spoke up with something approaching prophecy.

"Small part, in this murder, be damned! Slim, you pick somethin' tough for Old Man Lock's brainless son. The old uncle goes to war today. If I can't get it here on Federal, so help me God, I'll go where it is."

"I mean that, Cap Call," Loose Lip concluded, turning back to the top man.

Captain Call gazed at his old-line star mac. "I believe it, soldier," he said. "I might add—you and me both, Lockie."

Chapter III

YOU'VE HEARD OF SKY-HOOKS

THEN that black Sunday afternoon dragged itself toward the chill December dusk, and all Federal Proving Ground tried to keep itself at work—just to make the moves. Test pilots flew 'em high, wide and handsome; and Captain Call, with work on his desk, was glad to have it that way. No use having all those hot-ship pilots cluttering that office, pacing, biting their nails and bewailing the fact that they were there—on Federal—instead of being where they thought they should be—on Hickam, Luke, Wheeler, Nichols or Clark.

Loose Lip Lock, however, couldn't keep out of that flying office. And he was Captain Call's only visitor when the high sky west of Federal was suddenly dynamited by a new noise in that home of all noises. The Bushmaster squadron was coming in for a landing.

Twelve of the ugly hellers came down, landed one after the other, drilled in across the runway, and Storage hangar gobbled them fast. But the thirteenth Bushmaster remained aloft, and the noise of its circling was fine to hear.

"Guess Major Trump's going to show us what this ship can do," Captain Call said. "Class to him—bringing in this new super-pursuit, ultra-interceptor job."

"Huh," Loose Lip grunted, turning from Call's desk and moving toward the loft office's field-view, south windows, "what's he flyin'—two buzz saws an' a drawbar?"

"Worse than that," Captain Call answered. He, too, moved over toward the view windows. "This pilot-killer you're about to see is the Orr Aircraft's bid for the top—Bill Orr's Bushmaster. They say it's faster on the strike than is the Aira-cobra, more deadly than the Spitfire or Hurricane. First reports, Lockie, saw that this Bushmaster is as likely to kill its own crew—by blackout and exhaustion—as it is to get the enemy."

Out on the cement roadways and aprons all walkers and workers had sort of come to point—with all eyes and attention on that high southern sky. Looking up from the at-point walkers and workers, Captain Call and Loose Lip soon spotted the object of all those eyes. It was a small thing; and all that hellish wail of power could hardly be coming from there.

But that small, noisy thing was coming down. It wasn't in what you'd call a power dive—not in modern power-dive circles—but it was in a nose-down plunge that no dumb ape would call a safe landing glide. Yet, the ship was coming in for a landing.

It had been first at about ten-thousand elevation. Then, mere snaps of the fingers later, at about five thousand. Soon it was down to about two thousand—and still heading for the south end of the north-south runway strip. Comin' a-hellin', an' no dam' foolin'.

"Is this a pile-up?" Loose Lip mumbled.

Captain Call watched closely and said, "Damned if I know."

The ship was lower than a thousand then. It must have been carrying a diving speed upward of five hundred miles per hour. Even if it was going to jazz the field—merely drag the full length of the

long runway, then zoom—it was high time for that pilot to be lifting the nose. But the nose wasn't lifting.

Then, just as the observation tower guessed it was about time to sound off with the crash siren, something new and different began to happen; and even the all-wise airwise of Federal Proving Ground realized that Bill Orr had hit them with something new.

The Orr Bushmaster was beginning to trail air anchors.

Long glistening things had trailed aft from somewhere in the immediate neighborhood of its two engine nacelles. And as the pop-eyed watchers watched—and still held their breath—the glistening things grew larger, spread, and the Orr Bushmaster was being dragged out of its dive through quick benefit of air's first use of the ancient sea anchor — just expanding cones on long cables.

And while being pulled out of that hellish dive, the Orr Bushmaster and its trailing air anchors filled the world with more noise than aviation had ever before produced. And aviation has never been a very quiet thing. It was as though all brakes had been set on a mile-long freight drag, with said freight drag traveling across a world of loose tin roofs. It was awful. And watching, you knew that that performance was more than just awful on the man in that hell ship — Major Trump. Major Trump, the big brain guy of U. S. Air Forces, the high-domed fellow entrusted with the discovery of super airmen for super-super ships.

The Bushmaster, being slowed out of its hell dive, was unfolding its tricycle wheels —just a few hundred feet of the south end of the runway—then, with motors reduced, sort of feeling its now-slow way toward the ground. And when Trump put that ship on the cement, it was within two hundred feet of the south fence—just inside the reservation—and it hadn't rolled another fifty feet before all motion had gone out of the craft. Next, the air anchors began to draw in. As they came inboard, each cone folded on its cable.

As soon as the air anchors had disappeared, Major Trump slammed full gun back to both motors, the front wheel of the tricycle landing-gear seemed to stretch out its main strut—shoving the nose high —and that Orr Bushmaster was in the air again.

"Whew! What the hell have we just seen!" Loose Lip Lock gasped. "Dammit, man, am I awake?"

"You are," said Captain Call. "Lockie, you've just seen the answer to the last question. The last question being—how can Uncle Sam's Air Forces use small seacraft for aircraft bases? With this Bushmaster, Lockie, Uncle Sam can use every small ocean rock that he owns—and the Uncle sure owns lots of sea rocks, here and there."

"Boy, oh boy, it's the answer to something, an' not no maiden's prayer," said Loose Lip. "An' this Bushmaster is a two-man job. D'ja notice that, Cap?"

"Yes," Call said. "The pilot and his gunner sit back to back. Some seating arrangement. It means that the pilot takes care of everything in the front hemisphere of action, while the rear-facing gunner is responsible for everything aft."

"Sure," Loose Lip agreed. "An', anyway, it'll be good to have that guy lookin' aft so's he'll know where the tail went when them air-anchor cables pulls the rear half of the ship away from its motors. Air anchors! Cripes. It's one up on sky hooks."

"It's strictly a special-task ship," Captain Call said.

"Oh, so Air Corps has them now—special tasks—just like the Navy. Since when, Cap?" Loose Lip asked.

"Since Major Trump was put in charge of all special-tasks' operations, Lockie m'boy, when he was boosted a grade. And don't kid yourself, feller, there are special tasks lining up for this Air Force of ours. Man, this East Coast is hotter than you think."

CHAPTER IV

TRUMP ADDS MYSTERY

WHEN Major Trump came aloft into the test hangar's flying office, Loose Lip Lock was still on hand.

Trump said, "Are you keeping them flying, Captain?" to Call, and shook hands; then added, "And how are you, Lock? No, don't go, Lock. Stick around for a few minutes. How did you like that little show?"

"Soldier, that's awful. What the hell you got there—a flyin' cleaver, plus air coolin' an' automatic buryin' devices?"

"I knew you'd like it," Trump laughed. "This Orr job, gentlemen, is hot. Four-fifty per, on the straight-away, is easy. It'll climb—right up the dial, from six to twelve—almost as fast as in level flight; and she's gunned, fore and aft, as no ship has ever been gunned before."

"Great," said Captain Call. "Great, Major, if she doesn't disintegrate in flight. Lockie here claims the facing-aft gunner is placed that way so's he can see where the tail service went when the air-anchor cables take said tail service away with 'em."

"Which won't happen," said Trump. "That air-anchor thing isn't as bad as it appears—or as it sounds. And, gentlemen, how it sounds! Especially when you're right there in the office where all that queer stuff is happening.

"But, you know, the air anchors don't furnish the complete slow-up. Ye gods, no. The entire wing surface does a pivoted droop. Even the tail surfaces flatten to the line of flight. All cooling and ventilating louvers open wide; and those leading edges —of the wings—are slotted to the blast."

"In other words," said Captain Call, "with one twist of the wrist you can put back all the parasite resistance that aero research has been taking out during the past twenty-odd years?"

"And then some," Major Trump agreed. "And for what?"

"Not just for a short landing?" Call guessed.

"No," Trump stated. "It's for sure shots from something approaching placement, Captain. You see how it works; these special-task Bushmasters can come up behind an enemy bomber that's doing, let's say, two hundred miles per. The Bushmaster can blast in at full-gun, drop its air anchors, apply all other retarders, and pull down to even lower speed than the prey's two hundred. At the same time open all forward guns at what you might call a stand-still set."

Loose Lip Lock said, "If you don't get the enemy gunners with your guns, the surprise should kill 'em."

"Stick around, Lock," Major Trump laughed. "I'm going to give you a hop. Maybe I'll give you a thrill. Yes, sir, you'll be surprised.

"Kidding aside, though," Trump then said, "there'll be no time for joy hops, Lock. We'll be moving out."

"Soon?" Captain Call asked.

"When Adolf decides," said Trump. "When he Jap-a-lacs us."

"Got it figured as close as that?"

"You'd be surprised," said Trump. "Adolf had it scheduled for today. It was to dovetail with the Pearl Harbor attack. Clouds and fog on the French coast, during the past twenty-four hours, is all that held him up—all that gave us time to get set."

"And what was scheduled?" Call asked.

"Long-distance raids," Trump made known. "Suicide stunts, of course; and the biggest—just for terror effect—is to be aimed at New York City. That's the one we've got to head off. Naval Air is going to handle the attempts expected elsewhere."

"What a break for you guys!" exclaimed Loose Lip. "You get a chance to even off for Hickam. Man, would I give a right arm to be along! Any chance, Major?"

"Full crews, Lock. Sorry," Major Trump answered.

"Who's along, Major?" Captain Call asked, and there was a bit of justified envy in his voice. Maybe he'd like to be along.

"Plenty good men, Captain," enthused Trump. "Captains Hasty Williams, Jack Smith, Vern Young, Guy Carson, yes, and your old friend Mike O'Shea."

"That's only five pilots," Call figured.

"And Lieutenants Nanton, Pierce, Dell, Kane, King, Seed and Griffin," Trump said, "make thirteen."

"Aw hell, no chance for us," said Loose Lip, "so I might's well get back to me hangar work."

Chapter V

LOOSE LIP SWINGS MUCH LEAD

LOOSE LIP LOCK hadn't been back on the job—deep in the cramped mechanical bowels of an Airacobra—for a full ten minutes before Headquarters Orderly Squirt Hall sidled up, lowered his voice, and asked, "What ja doin', pal?"

"Mindin' my own biz, ya dam' runner-off-at-the-mouth, you! What do you know, Squirt?" Loose Lip's question was soft.

"Plenty, big boy. Plenty," said Squirt.

"Do I gotta squirm outa this fuselage an' pry open that yap of yourn?" Loose Lip barked. "Let's have it."

"Ya know that secret gang down in Storage hangar?" Squirt whispered. "I mean them pilots an' gunners with Major Trump?"

"Do I know 'em! Do I know 'em! I know everybody in this here Air Corps," Loose Lip growled. "So what?"

"Well," Squirt said, "the guys from over to Signal Corps Section 're equippin' Storage hangar with a special radio and telegraph room. An' that ain't all, either."

"Well, come on. Come on," Loose Lip urged. "Speak up, you're among friends —among one friend—ya dam' little enemy of the white race. Dam' you, Squirt, I think you're a Fifth Columnist."

"Keep quiet. Quit ya yellin'," Squirt urged. "Listen, a English navy guy showed up down at Storage. He's one of them radio guys. An' there's a Portugal feller, too. He's radio. The Chief of Staff was down in that hangar with the Old Man, too."

"Squirt," Loose Lip warned, "you shut up about them guys!"

"Gee," the kid whispered—"French guys, Limey Gus an' all kinds."

Loose Lip sort of drew out of the Airacobra's hard shell and glanced upward toward Captain Call's loft office when a door opened up there at the top of the stairs. Slim Rand, test hangar's chief mac, was coming from Call's office; and in his hand Rand held a slip of paper.

"Just a shake, blabber-mouth," Slim Rand sang out, "don't duck back into that shell. I've got a job for you."

"Scram, bum," Loose Lip growled toward Squirt. Then, to Slim Rand, he said, "Yes, Boss? Yes, Boss? What can I do for you, Boss—you dam', long-drawn drink of somethin' that's too bad for human consumption? What's wanted of a good mac?"

"Good mac—be damned! You mitt-flopper, you!" said Slim Rand. Then he flipped the slip of paper. "Here's a list of five motor macs. You round up these lugs, tell 'em to roll their tools, do the same by yourself, then report down at Storage. You're in charge of this detail, hand-kisser, assigned to Major Trump; and you guys stay down there at Storage till relieved.

"And, man, oh man, will it be some relief for the rest of us to be shed of your loud yappin'? Say, do I remember right? Was this Trump gent always a friend of yours?"

"Trump knows class," Loose Lip boasted; and there are few who can boast more boastfully than can Loose Lip Lock. "Just a while ago—up in flyin' office—the major says to me, he says 'Stick round, Lock ol' pal, me an' you's gonna do things an' go places together.'

"Say, Slim, did I ever tell you about the

time me an' Trump flew that job in from the West Coast an'—"

"Aw, hell, not now. Not now," Slim Rand begged. "There's work to be done. So turn this Airacobra job over to Kelly, an' please, oh please, get t'hell an' gone outa my sight."

"I could tell ya stuff that'd make your hair stand on end, Slim—if you had any hair. Oh, say. Where's them small cable-cutters that you borried from me last week?"

"Small cable-cutters?" Slim Rand repeated. "Oh, sure, they're in my office. What you gonna do—a small wrecking job?"

"Ya can never tell," said Loose Lip. "Man, could I tell you stuff that'd make your hair stand at attention!"

WALKING down to Storage, ten or fifteen minutes later, Loose Lip spread the mystery stuff by impressing his five-man detail with the importance of things to come.

"You guys don't know what I've cut you in on," he said. "So keep ya lip buttoned, an' don't go blahin' it all over the post what you see in Storage hangar. As it is, I bet the guard won't let you guys by the door without a argument. But you know me—O' Man Lock's smart son can handle the job in hand."

"We'll never be able to thank you enough, kind sir," said Motor Mac Jack McGlynn. "Last time you marched us down to this here Storage hangar, Loose Lip, we spent the afternoon massaging wing surfaces, motor bays and firewalls. Remember that?"

"Them days is gone forever, Jack," Loose Lip stated. "Man, you're where things is happenin', what I mean, an' you guys can thank me for cuttin' you in on the doin's. Wouldn't be a bad idea if you guys chipped in an' bought me a little present, come payday."

Motor Mac East said, "Let's do something nice for *us* at the same time. Let's chip in and buy Loose Lip a zipper for this open vent in the front of his head."

"Zipper—? Zipper—?" Loose Lip remarked, coming to a full stop just as they reached the side door of Storage. "Cutters, cable-cutters. That's what I was tryin' to remember. Look, East, just to show that you want to do somethin' nice for me, let me have your kit an' junk, an' you trot back to the test hangar an' get my cable-cutters from Slim Rand."

"Cable-cutters?" East asked, handing his tool-kit and other items over to Loose Lip. "What's the hurry about getting a pair of cable-cutters now?"

"They're mine," Loose Lip said. "Slim just borried 'em."

"They'll keep," argued East.

"I might never get back to test hangar again," Loose Lip said. "An' I wouldn't want Slim Rand gainin' by the hangar's loss."

"What do you mean, you mightn't ever get back to test?" Jack McGlynn put in.

"Just that," Loose Lip said. "I have an idea they're gonna make me Chief of Air, or somethin'. Tell you what, it ain't every mac, like me, that can walk slam-bang into a guarded hangar like this."

"Where d'you think you're going, Lock?" the man on the side door, Post Guard Higgins, barked. And as he barked, Guard Higgins stepped across Loose Lip's advance and threatened to bite.

"Goin' in, 'Iggins. So step aside m'man or I'll call a real guard an' 'ave ye tooken care of," Loose Lip threatened.

The door behind Guard Higgins opened a crack. Major Trump peeked out through the slight opening and said, "Pass the detail, guard"; and Loose Lip glanced past Guard Higgins and said, "Oh, you on hand, Major? Where's this here Bushmaster labor?"

From that minute onward, warned to secrecy by Trump, Loose Lip and his crew took over. The Bushmasters, at closer view, were eye-openers even for these Federal Proving Ground macs, but Loose Lip was just the man to explain the fine points

when Captain Call came in, half an hour later, for his first close study of the great equipment.

"Look at 'em, Cap. A pair of 2,000-horsepower P & W units on each nose. 4,000 horse in a ship that a good man could pick up an' toss across this hangar."

"Lord, what craft!" said Call.

"Two cannon an' eight machine-guns on the front," Loose Lip continued, "an' a turret cannon an' a brace of four machine-guns in the rear. Fuel enough for two thousand miles, an' speed that'll crowd five hundred per. What more could a man ask?"

"A chance to be there—when they get there," mused Captain Call.

Chapter VI

DEATH IN STORAGE

MAJOR TRUMP and his crews stuck close to that hangar—or, at least, to the post. America, now at least, was on the alert.

The thirteen gunners, all top-notch men from the big-ship squadrons, worked guns by the hour. These were a clannish gang, when compared to the pilots, and Loose Lip wished that something might happen to one of them—maybe a broken leg—so's he could get one of those facing-aft jobs. He even told Captain Call as much.

"I'll sick the guard on you," said Call, "if you harm even the least of them. But (slowly) break a pilot's leg, too."

The guard in question was certainly something to see—and wonder about. It was over-heavy on a proving ground that has never gone in for shoddy, light guards. Now, during twilight hours, even the post C.O. had to identify himself for guards who'd known him for months and even years. As for approaching Storage hangar after the dark hours had set in—well, that was a stunt for shock troops. In brief, the tension was on. And it was going to be a tight night.

And the radio barrage was on. That international galaxy of wireless and code experts were all on the job.

"It's like bein' back in the army, confined to post for gettin' a bit drunkie," Loose Lip told Captain Call, during one of the captain's usual visits. "Well, I don't put up no kick, just so long's I'm on hand to shove open them doors—when the time comes—an' help toss these babies into the air—at Hitler—if the time does ever come."

"Great day," Captain Call mumbled. "There's a great day comin' in the mawnin', Lockie. If it doesn't come at night."

"You know somethin', Cap?" Loose Lip asked, guardedly. "You're not holdin' out on me, eh?"

"No, nothing certain," Call said.

"If them Nutzi Fifth Columnists knew that these Bushmasters was all set to go an' do it," Loose Lip surmised, "they'd surer'n hell view with alarm, tear their hair an' try their damndest to hold 'em to this shore. Yes, sir, if them lousy rats knew that these—"

Loose Lip's words hung up—right there, high and dry in mid-air. But Loose Lip didn't hang up. He was on the move.

There was the devil of a racket in the far, rear corner of the big Storage hangar—back in the dead space behind all the parked Bushmasters—and macs and lounging pilots, gunners and other Trump & Co. attaches were beginning to move that way. Also, the inner members of the post guard were getting under way.

First there was the rattling and clanging of a heavy metal plate; and those present—such as Loose Lip and Call—guessed that it would be one of the service covers that span the manhole opening along the hangar's rear wall.

Those manholes—three in each hangar—lead down to the different utility services; to the heating tunnel, the telephone and electric conduit tunnel, and to the field's storm drain system.

With the clanging of that cover, there

came a muffled, scuffling sound. Then two shots cracked out—and a third.

That was all, for the time being.

When the first of the post guards crowded his way past the parked Bushmasters and arrived on the scene of action, he found one of Trump's gunners—a Lieutenant Satcher—sprawled face-down in a spreading pool of blood. Satcher, plainly enough, had jumped two hangar-crashers as they came up out of that storm-drain opening. The guard was just in time to see one head dropping back into the manhole—going back down the ladder. At the same time, that guard, knowing his stuff and taking no chances, opened fire on a second gent who stood with an arm drawn back—in throwing stance—on the near side of the manhole opening. When the guard's sawed-off piece barked, that second hangar-crasher sort of splashed; and the pieces of him dropped back into the hole that had just taken that other ladder-descending head. Almost at the same split second, that manhole blew hot flame—fire that shot to the roof girders—and an explosion blast rattled roof plates—and Bushmaster wings—from one end of Storage to the other.

The guard near the opening stiffened, dropped his sawed-off piece, began to topple—into the fire-vomiting manhole—like a felled tree; and big Loose Lip Lock made a flying tackle, through the last five yards of his advance, and swept that post guard hard against the hangar's rear wall.

Major and Captain Call snatched the chemical fire-extinguishers from the wall racks, and the hell of that minute had passed.

The chief of guards, gazing down the manhole, said, "No show of color down there. Guess those boys have gone away. You hear lots about guys that were going to toss nitroglycerin vials. But you neither hear nor see any more of guys who fall on 'em.

"You've got a dead gunner here, Major Trump—and, I guess, I've got a shell-shocked member of my guard. Otherwise, the hangar seems to be in order."

Chapter VII

BERLIN SPEAKING

THAT attempt on the Bushmaster squadron, far-fetched though the idea may seem, must have been very closely coordi-

nated with Axis operations on the far side of the broad Atlantic.

During the next two hours, radio reports —from British stations and Atlantic Patrol ships at sea—had repeatedly advised the experts in Storage that the big-ship operations of the Axis air forces were almost entirely missing from the Atlantic area.

Four hours after the nitroglycerin vial had blown two hangar-crashes to pieces in that storm-drain manhole, the Free French expert in Storage de-coded a short-wave transmission that came in from a secret station at or near Bordeaux. De-coded, that message said that all Focke-Wulf flying boats of the Nazi Bordeaux station were being held to the river—being made ready for mass flight.

"The Focke-Wulfs, eh?" Major Trump repeated. "Gentlemen, it is a Focke-Wulf job if it's a job at all. Maybe we're going to get some action for our money, at last."

Half an hour later, that Free French observation post near Bordeaux made a second coded report. When this was broken down, the Storage Free-Frenchman said, "There are thirty-two Focke-Wulf boats in the group, Major Trump."

"Thirty-two sacrifice-flight s h i p s?" Trump questioned. "That's a lot of big ships to put in a race where you only intend to show. Adolf, you know, doesn't intend to get any of these back. They'll just get to their objective—plus bomb load —and then, within an hour or two, run out of fuel."

"Yeah," said Loose Lip Lock, always among them present, "an' that's the hell of it. They can dump their eggs, kill thousands of old folks, wimmin an' kids, then set down an' surrender."

"Maybe not as easy as all that, Lock," Major Trump said. "God forbid that it be as easy as all that."

"Me—I'm no religious guy," Loose Lip said, "but I'd give the good right arm to be in a spot where I could take this detail off'n God's hands. Why should the good Lord bother with low devils like these Nazi baby-killers when a willin' heller like Ol' Man Lock's useless son is hangin' round doin' nothin' much for the white race? An' God'a'mity knows the white race is in a spot today."

"We'll have to put you to work, Lock," Major Trump said, and laughed. "By the way," he added, as though speaking to himself, "that reminds me. I have a bit of work to do. Lieutenant Satcher—game guy that he was!—was scheduled to ride out as my gunner. Now I'll have to locate another man. Let's see—"

"Man, you've come to the right place, an' at the exact right time," said Loose Lip. "I won't have a thing to do after you shove off, Major, so I might just as well be sittin' there at your back."

Major Trump, recalling a hard flight made when he was just "Lieutenant" Trump, mused, "You sat behind me once before, Lock. And you turned in a fine job of air-work, too. You were there—at a time when I was trimmed down to where I was far less than half there.

"But as you know," he added, "this present flying job is a little different. I don't question your willingness—nor your gameness—but, on this hop, the gun's the thing."

"Major, you're talkin' to old Gunner Lock. Look what I done when I hopped the South Atlantic with them Limies in the big Blenheim bomber. Was that gunnin'? Was that battle? Hell, Major, give a man credit."

"That's right. I'd sort of forgotten that Atlantic-Bridge flight, Lock," Trump apologized. "A special report from the R.A.F., to Headquarters, told us more about you than you ever did."

"Not by a dam'site!" Loose Lip yelled. "Nobody, nowhere, ever told more about me than I can tell. No, sir, I won't have any guy, or group of guys, out-Locking Lock himself. But I see your point, Major. Sure. Sure, this hop is over my head, far outa my class. It calls for men. Damned if it don't. An' you've got 'em with you

on this line-up. But I'll boast like hell to my grandkids an' tell 'em that I stood in the same hangar with the Bushmaster group."

Major Trump was studying his watch then; and all hangar lights were turned on. It was seven-fifteen in the evening. One of the English experts was bringing in a short-wave broadcast from a North of Ireland sending point. For a few minutes all hands in Storage hangar's radio room stood by and listened.

"The Admiralty reported late this afternoon that a record flight of four-engined American bombers has been delivered to these shores. Not a single bomber was lost in the transatlantic hop.

"Also, during the past twenty-four hours, American-made, four-engined bombers have ranged over Germany, bombing Kiel, Berlin and southeast Germany points.

"This is the first official report of southeast-Germany bombings. And, to add insult to injury, all these forays were made during the daylight hours. All four-engined craft returned safely."

"Ooh, that's what hurts Adolf, and Herman—if Herman can still feel the hurt," Major Trump said. "American-made, four-unit bombers? The butchers never thought they'd have to take this."

"American aid," stated Loose Lip, in a great, bombastic voice, "weel be too late to safe Eenglan'!"

"American aid," said one of the Storage Britishers, "has already saved England, Lockie m'boy. But the major is correct; this is the medicine that really does Adolf and Fatty no particular good. It's hard-to-take medicine. It must be stopped, or at least hindered. Delayed. This, gentlemen, appears to be just about the time for something. The something being what we've waited for."

The British short-wave broadcast carried on with a last, closing item.

"A Berlin news broadcast, earlier this evening, advised the Nazi well-wishers to expect great things in the Atlantic. This," added the British newscaster, "you'll recall, isn't the first time that Nazi news broadcasts have forewarned their public of things to come. . . . We wonder what is to come. The Battle of the Atlantic has been so peaceful of late. And snow-bound Russia is too hot for Nazis."

Chapter VIII

CAPTAIN CALL GIVES WAY

BETWEEN that time and midnight, the air waves sizzled with hot news. It was general news—from Cairo, Budapest, Russia, Rome, Madrid—and special code communications from England, the Azores and the Atlantic Fleets, British and Yank. Midnight came, then the chill hours of the graveyard shift; and only the radio experts and wireless men sat around the coffee pot and swapped yarns in the low voice. But along toward three a.m., something hot came in from a British battlewagon some fifty-odd miles southwest of Brest, France. The English code man took that flash, put the result on paper, then called Major Trump.

"This, sir," he reported, "seems to be cause enough to wake one from a sound sleep."

"Don't kid me, Mister," Trump said, sitting there on his army cot and trying to rub sleep from heavy eyes. "There's no such thing as sound sleep. What have we got this time?"

The Englishman held the communication. "It's early morning, sir, off the French coast. This wireless from H.M.S. *Royal Warrior* reports unusual Nazi air activities over the area west of the Channel. Great flights of Messerschmitts, Junkers, Stukas and Heinkels. All fast fighter units, sir. They appear to be combing the Atlantic. That is, what you might call sweeping the area—enough of them to clear the bally pond of any British or American air patrols that might be

found. And French-coast weather is now quite clear, sir."

"This sounds good," Major Trump enthused. "And, er—

"You got something, Lieutenant Fachet?" the major then asked, noticing that the Free French operator was coming away from his table.

"From our La Rochelle observation point—north of Bordeaux, Major Trump," the Frenchman reported. "The early-morning Nazi squadrons are filling the over-sea lanes with fighter planes down that way, too.

"And, also, here is a flash that came from the Bordeaux point less than an hour ago. It makes known that there has been all-night service activities where the Focke-Wulfs are gathered."

Shortly after that—at 3:10—and while Trump still sat on his bunk and talked lowly to the radiomen, the guard outside Storage hangar challenged. Trump and those who were awake heard the reply to that challenge; and then the side door was opened.

Captain Call and a civilian walked in.

"Gentlemen," Captain Call whispered, "meet Mr. Rider.

"Mr. Rider," he then went on to explain, "is with the Federal Bureau of Investigation. He has some news that should be of interest to you fellows."

"Oh, hello again, Major Trump," Special Agent Rider said, shaking hands with the major, and thus indicating that they'd met before. "Hell of a time to bring news, good or bad, isn't it?

"Well, this is what I want to tell you. As you men must know, the F.B.I. keeps a close check on all pro-Axis agents—bundsmen, American-Front saps, etc. Fact is, we tail 'em so close that their shadows and our shadows think they're closely related. We know thousands of them; and the bigger shots they are, the better we know 'em.

"Large and small, gentlemen, they're beginning to quit downtown New York."

"So it's to be New York?" Major Trump decided.

"Right," Rider agreed. "The big pro-Ratzi boys—the boys with offices—are even removing files and records. We understand that they're shipping their belongings to points across the Hudson, and miles beyond."

"This gives us a line to work on, Mr. Rider," Major Trump said, with an enthusiasm that had nothing to do with sitting on a hard army cot in a chill hangar between three and four of the morning. "And the line should be one connecting the Focke-Wulf bombing base near Bordeaux and the tall-building section of downtown New York."

"What's the mileage on that line, Major?" Rider asked.

"Roughly, 3,500," Major Trump stated.

"Thirty-five hundred?" Rider questioned. "Seven thousand, roundtrip, with fuel and bomb load—why, I thought we were the only ones with bombers equal to a hop like that."

"One was shot down in England just the other day that could do it easy," Major Trump made known. "Or these may be only one-way boys, out merely as an object lesson—a lesson at the hands of Great Teacher Hitler. The *Luftwaffe* fanatics, of course, would know that it couldn't be more than a one-way trip. Yes, like the Japs."

Major Trump was on his feet by then; and Call, Rider and the radiomen had followed him to a table map.

"We've had some hot tips during the night, Captain," Trump said. "This, if the signs prove up, might be the day."

"And you're set?" Rider asked.

"Yes," Trump answered. Then, on second thought, he said that he wasn't. "The flight is," he explained, "but my new gunner hasn't showed up yet. Oh, maybe you didn't hear—we had a nasty little affair here in the hangar last evening. I lost my rear-seat man, Lieutenant Satcher."

"I know all about that," Agent Rider

half whispered. "You men in here certainly saved face for my boys. We thought we had that pair of nitro tossers safely cornered forty miles from here.

"But you say that Gunnery hasn't sent over another man to fill Lieutenant Satcher's place, eh?"

"Nobody's showed up," Major Trump said. "It puts me in a spot if this thing should break suddenly, and the flight has to get under way. Say, Captain, you could assign yourself to this gun handling job. I know you'd like it."

For half a minute, standing there with an Atlantic map spread before his eyes, Call's eyes told that he would like it. Then, hearing something behind him, Call slowly turned. Loose Lip Lock was supposed to be asleep—on his army cot in the outer hangar—but he was standing there in the doorway. Standing there with his big mouth wide open in a mighty yawn, arms stretching and eyes blinking.

"Oh, hello, Cap. How are you, Mr. Rider? Long time no see. Anythin' doin', Major Trump?" Loose Lip greeted, stated and asked.

"Yes, there's something doing, Lockie m'man," Captain Call kidded. "Major Trump was just saying that he's shy one gunner. I was just going to tell the major that I'm too busy in test hangar to leave my job, even for fun, so I was going to suggest the best aerial gunner I ever knew."

"Shucks, Cap," Loose Lip objected. "I don't like to hear you talk that way about me—here in front of all these gents—an' 'specially when I'm here to tell about myself.

"An' the cap's right, Major," Loose Lip then told Trump. "He's so busy in test, these days, that he don't know if he's a foot or a horse's back—"

"Do you, Cap?" Loose Lip asked, turning to Call.

"Or a horse's neck, you horse's tail, you," Call remarked.

"All right. I know when I'm outnumbered," Major Trump agreed. "Lock, you're in. Be all set to rise and fly when the time comes."

Chapter IX

ZERO AT THREE

IT WAS close to 4 a.m. when the Free-French radioman took another code flash from his near-Bordeaux observation point. The flash said that the Focke-Wulf four-engined jobs were getting under way. Also, the flash made known, all Nazi markings had been removed from the big flying boats.

"There's a Hitler lesson for us," Major Trump said. "The nasty ape is covering himself and our pro-Nazi boys all at one and the same time. He can say these Focke-Wulfs didn't belong to Germany; and our Nazi-lovers can sing the same tune. They can even say that these are Focke-Wulfs that fell into English hands, and that the New York raid is an R.A.F. job.

"Let's see, it's about nine in the morning at Bordeaux. And a Focke-Wulf can hit 230 miles per. Give 'em an hour or two for headwinds—or dodging of fleet units at sea—and they should strike late this afternoon."

"No doubt during the traffic peak hours," Agent Rider surmised; "when the downtown streets and subways are jammed. That would be a crowded schoolroom to Adolf's liking. Wonder whether we'd have time to get into New York and mark the orphanage, hospital and old-folks'-home roofs so's the bloody butchers will have something familiar to aim bombs at?"

Captain Call and Major Trump were getting down to work now. They were scaling that Bordeaux-New York line, checking time against every 230 miles a Focke-Wulf could put behind it in an hour's flight, and trying to figure just when an interceptor group should quit Federal to meet those Focke-Wulfs *here*.

"Here, about here," Major Trump said,

putting his finger on an Atlantic spot about one hundred miles off Nova Scotia's south coast. "Let's see. That's about 700 miles from here, a loafing two hours' cruise for our Bushmasters. And far enough out so that we should be able to sink them without trace. I want to be well off the Halifax ship lane, too. If luck's with us, we want Adolf to be left without a trace of what happened to his object lesson."

"You're a hard man, Major Trump," Rider said, and grinned.

"Just a toughie goin' out to meet up with the other big toughies," Major Trump agreed. "Less than two-hours' flight," he then restated. "Say we give ourselves the full two hours. That means we should depart this field at not later than three this afternoon."

"Looks about right," Captain Call estimated. "And, with luck holding, you should be back on this post with late twilight, at worst."

"Three it is then," Trump decided. "And, take it from me, gentlemen, twilight is the least you'll settle for when it comes to landing these Bushmaster hotshots."

The Free-French radioman had another code flash on his pad. After he'd worked it out, he said, "This one, Major Trump, is from the La Rochelle observation point. It reports that the big Focke-Wulf formation —all thirty-two boats—has passed out to sea off Ile de Re, one hundred miles northwest of Bordeaux. They came to that point under heavy fighter coverage; and squadrons of Junkers Stukas took over the protection there. No doubt the Stukas will remain to the extent of their fuel supply, guarding against any likely British Fleet anti-aircraft that might be encountered off the French coast."

"That's fine," Trump enthused. "I hope the fighter and Stuka coverage keeps the big jobs safe—safe for us. Man, oh man, how they're going to miss that coverage when the Bushmasters strike."

Loose Lip Lock said, "Too dam' bad there ain't some way you could warn them that I'm goin' to be along."

"No," Captain Call objected. "Hell no! There's a limit to cruelty. Civilized warfare outlawed dumdums long ago."

"Dumdums?" Loose Lip repeated. "Cap, that has all the earmarks of a nasty crack. I'll think it over an' let you know if me or the Heinies've been unduly insulted."

CHAPTER X

A PLAN FOR A PLAN

DURING the dawn hours of that day, code message after code message came into that Storage hangar. Rider and Captain Call stuck around to learn what was happening.

An English cruiser, some two hundred miles off La Rochelle, reported when the big flight, still covered by Stuka protection, passed that point. The cruiser's radio officer gave the altitude of the Focke-Wulfs as about ten thousand feet. Direction west-south-west. He gave the flying condition as "high broken clouds." And also reported that other Fleet weather reports indicated heavier clouds, with some rain, farther west—north of the Azores.

"Gee," said the ever-present Mr. Loose Lip Lock, "let's pray against bad weather for them hellers. Let's hope they have nothing but the best—till they meet up with us an' find Bushmasters in their slipstream."

The next report, along toward when the gang was warming up the breakfast coffee on the electric grid, came in from a Portuguese patrol ship. Orderly Squirt Hall's Portugal guy, handing over the de-coded message, gave the patrol ship's location as some two hundred miles northeast of the Azores. The notice merely said that a great roar—a mighty combination of great roars —had passed west-southwest in the high overcast. The patrol ship was in rainy seas.

"Aw, dammit," Loose Lip Lock la-

mented. "Our luck's gonna run out on us. Them yellow-bellied Krauts won't carry on in a storm sky. Not them! Hell no, they always demand favorable odds."

"That isn't the thing that's bothering me," Major Trump said. "Men who'll sail out on a sacrifice flight must have something besides ocher tummies. It's the perfection of this spotting system set up by this radio and wireless group that now gives cause for pause. Won't the enemy, coming west, tumble that something is afoot when their own earmuffs and radio bays are full of double-talk and crackling code stuff?"

"Cause for pause," Captain Call agreed. "Devil of a note if ye be hoist on ye own petard."

And even as Trump and Call exchanged those voiced snatches of possible griefs, one of Federal's own Signal Corps sergeants came out of his small booth and handed Major Trump a de-coded message.

TRUMP, shaking his head with apprehension, said, "See what I mean? Get this." And he read: U. S. Navy Observation Patrol Aircraft No. X-2-E, reporting flight of thirty-two Focke-Wulf boats flying west-southwest, above clouds, altitude 10,000. This craft, X-2-E, flying 22,000, unseen by Focke-Wulf group.

"There's a pal," Loose Lip enthused. "That Navy guy stays up there at 22,000, just takes his look-see, an' doesn't horn in on our party. Hey, Signal Corps, if you contact that gob again tell him the drinks are on me, if an' when."

"If and when what?" the Signal Corps wirelessman stopped long enough to determine.

"If an' when that gob catches up with me, pins my shoulders to the bar, then picks my pocket. Hell, my old gent wasn't part Scotch for nothin'."

"Still at about ten thousand feet," Major Trump mused, referring, of course, to the altitude of the Focke-Wulfs as given by Navy's No. X-2-E observer. "A Focke-Wulf raises 20,000, at its service ceiling. If they're holding to that ten thousand, through storm and clouds, it must be because they're at least eight-months gone with fuel and bomb load."

"What's their best bomb load?" Mr. Rider wanted to know.

"At least three tons to the ship," Trump answered.

"Three times thirty-two," Rider mused. "Ninety-six, say one hundred tons. Hell, no wonder the rats in the know are getting out of the Times Square-Grand Central area. Ninety-six tons, put down during a daylight hour, could Coventrize quite a strip."

Major Trump stared at Rider for a full half minute. It's likely that he sensed great concern in the F.B.I. man's voice. It's even likely that Trump smelled a mouse.

"How about groundwork?" he asked.

"Groundwork?" Rider repeated.

"Yes. Is the Focke-Wulf operation the entire story, or has your department uncovered other angles?"

Rider's eyes swept all present. Then he said. "The air raid is only the opening gun, as planned. I told you that the big boys are pulling out to safety. They always do. What I didn't tell you is that, during the past few weeks, they've brought in hundreds of sabotage experts and terrorists."

"And you put the hand on all of these?" Trump asked.

"No. We've got the plan of action—their plan—but our boys won't be able to gather them all in until these rats come to man their assigned stations just before raid time. And this, gentlemen, is why the great Hitler lesson wasn't stopped before it left the French coast. It could have been, and I don't have to tell you that. We want this collection of bad actors that we're going to take in downtown New York this afternoon. If it comes off according to our plan, we'll collar these rats watching the sky along toward five o'clock. And if we gather them in, it should put a stop

to all dock fires, munition-plant blazes and the rest of the sabotage.

"So it's up to you and your group, Major Trump, to see to it that we don't have to work in panic and confusion," Mr. Rider concluded.

"Cripes, Mr. R'der, you couldn't be tradin' with an older an' more reliable firm. Your order's took an' as good as delivered," Loose Lip Lock promised. "An' now, gents, I'm gonna get more sleep."

CHAPTER XI

IT'S MONDAY, DEC. 8TH, 1941

AT NOON Captain Call washed out all test-hopping work on, over or near Federal Proving Ground. Over at the Navy's seaplane ramp, the station commandant did likewise. Even the hangar doors at both establishments were closed, with hundreds of macs doing their mechanical work under lights. War on Japan had been declared at noon.

At one o'clock a transport was pushed out of Visiting Ships hangar. Test Pilot Murphy climbed aloft to the control bay. Then Special Agent Rider told Major Trump and the boys down in Storage good-by, climbed into that transport and started for La Guardia Field, New York. When Rider climbed aboard that ship, four other guys just like him seemed to come up out of the cracks in the concrete apron and climb in with him.

Watching from where he stood in Storage hangar's side door, Loose Lip Lock said, "I bet I could throw my voice on this here post an' hit half a dozen G-guys without even tryin'. Them guys is everywhere. Damned if they ain't!"

A little later Major Trump summoned all pilots, gunners, armorers, radiomen and macs into a huddle. It was quite a mess of manpower to jamb in there where already thirteen Bushmasters were overloading the big hangar to its limit. Fact is, Trump & Company, as they stood there in silence, numbered fifty-five men; and not a man of them but was over-trained, waiting-weary, and ready for the major's little pep talk.

"Gentlemen," Trump finally said, "this is the day. At three we rise and fly."

And the macs in nearby hangars, working behind those closed doors, wondered what'n'hell all that crazy cheering was about. Could the war be over? Before Uncle Sam even got revenge?

Trump went on: "We haven't talked much of our reason for being here, but I guess we all knew the answers from the first. Well, three hours ago—at ten o'clock—the enemy was at about mid-Atlantic; and right on time. There're thirty-two Focke-Wulf boats in the flight. That, I think, is about every Focke-Wulf big job left in Goering's force. You'll remember that the R.A.F. wiped out the Focke-Wulf factory some months ago. So if we get these—and get them right—we end one devil of a scourge of air raiding that has cost the allies too many ships at sea."

The only man then standing by at the radio and wireless sets, the Signal Corps sergeant, came out of his bay, message in hand.

"Sir, this wasn't in code. The gob on this dam' old U. S. battlewagon, southeast off Newfoundland, rapped it out in straight Morse. I think he was excited."

"And careless," Trump speculated, as he took the message.

Then he read it to his group: Double flight of big ships passing this point bound west-southwest. Sixteen ships to flight. Thirty-two, all told. Altitude, appx. 10,000. Sky clear. Sea good. No markings on ships. Identified as Focke-Wulf. Remember Pearl Harbor!

"Damned careless!" Major Trump repeated.

"Hell, sir, yes!" agreed Loose Lip Lock. "That's the way to scare guests away from the party. An' them dam' yeller-bellies ain't gonna sit in at any game 'less they

have the cards marked, an' a hand on the light switch. But that Remember-Pearl-Harbor thing!"

Major Trump shook his head, grinned and said, "Our friend Lock here holds our enemy lightly, gentlemen."

"Aw hell, gang," Loose Lip boasted, "When I was out with that Blenheim, down on the Atlantic Bridge, we potted said enemy like clay pipes in a shootin' gallery. An' they cracked up just as easy. Somebody still owes me a handful of punk cigars for that shootin'."

"I'll promise you real cigars if you do as well this time, Lock," Major Trump said.

"A flock of Heinies is as good as sunk," Loose Lip stated.

At two o'clock sharp, Storage hangar's great front was opened wide; and thirteen Bushmasters were being trundled out to the line.

Armorers and macs, pilots and gunners, radio and wireless men began to swarm over, in and under those thirteen hell ships for the final check-up.

From somewhere — perhaps Long Island's Mitchel Field—three flights of fast fighters—two of Airacobras and one of the new Federal P-47 Thunderbolts — came down toward Federal Proving Ground and then fell to a wide circling of the post. No pro-Axis piece of aircraft was going to sneak in and pass that flying barrier; and that flying barrier was just one more sign of the times. A sign that it can happen here—unless America's eternally on the ball!

OUT near the tail of Major Trump's No. 1 ship, Gunner-Mechanic Loose Lip Lock was down on his knees when Captain Call strolled up from Test hangar, passed the heavy guard, and spoke to his star motor doctor.

"Think you'll need them, Lockie?" Call asked.

"Cap, I wouldn't dare cross a busy street without these," Loose Lip answered. The "these" were his tools. Now he was busy making two tool-kit rolls into one. That is, he was sorting out the heavier, non-essential tools from his own kit and adding the few tools necessarily carried by an aerial gunner.

Captain Call watched the sorting for a full minute in silence. Then, kidding for fun, he said, "You're a good gunner, eh?"

"None better," Loose Lip admitted. "I know everything about a ship, 'specially about Bushmasters. Want to ask me anything, Mister?"

"Why, yes," Captain Call answered. "Maybe you could explain just how these Orr air anchors operate."

"Oh, ya think you've got me stumped, eh?" Loose Lip was quick to cheer. "Well, now listen, young feller, it's this way; the Orr air anchor—as used on the Orr Bushmaster—consists of one hundred feet of quarter-inch, special-made, costly, high-duty, very-flexible cable. Down through the center of this special cable are two insulated circuit wires. These furnish the current that controls the six two-foot chute-cones on each cable. These chute-cones each weigh fifteen pounds. It took Bill Orr and two other smart dopes a full year to perfect them. The chute-cones are made of special steel mesh—a mesh wider than that found in a dame's mesh hand-bag. Them mesh links are, course for course, both positive and negative, electrically speakin'. Every mesh ring is covered with a special G.E. silk fiber. The fibers—millions of the bloody little whiskers to the square foot—have one free end. When the current is turned on full—the current from the main engine generator—them millions of charged fibers reach out and close all gaps between the positive an' negative rings; an' you have a solid, air-resistin' parachute silk, mesh-lined an' stronger'n'-Billy H. Hell hisself.

"That's when you let the chute run back outa its undermotor housin'—when you want air anchors. Now when you get through with 'em, an' you want to get that mess of chutes inboard, out o' the way, you

just flip the switch on the instrument-board, cut the current, an' that's that. When the current's cut, why the fibers drop their gap-closin'; an' the air blows free through the mesh. Then the chute-cones hug back around the cable, an' you throw another switch an' reel 'em in by power. Get it, Mister?"

"Didn't think you knew," Captain Call told Loose Lip. "Sure I get it. But I don't believe it."

"Neither do I," said Loose Lip. "Our old pal Bill Orr is a nut. Crazy like a fox. The guy used to be one of them early-day circus flyers before he gave up honest aviation an' went to work takin' government contracts."

"Sure," Captain Call agreed. "Orr should be spending his time inventing a comfortable strait jacket. He's going to wind up in one. Look at these Bushmasters! Puf-fff! Wouldn't be seen even sitting in one of them. What's 40,000 feet? What's a miserly 450 miles per hour? Some day you'll see ships doing 60,000 and making better than 1,000 miles per hour."

"Sh-h-h, don't tell anybody that I went out with this outfit," Loose Lip begged. "But you know how it is; this man Trump needs one good man in the outfit."

Chapter XII

Is This Luck?

LOOSE LIP LOCK, tool-kit in hand, had climbed aboard ship No. 1. Captain Call, just to kill time, had swung up to the catwalk of the mighty monoplane's left wing. Standing there, leaning elbows on the gunnel of the long, open, two-place cockpit, he gazed within and watched Loose Lip as that mechanical whiz tried to locate a good resting place for the ever-present, priceless tool-kit. Not so easy to find such a resting place! That rear half of the pit—the office wherein Loose Lip was to dominate a scene or two—was damned short on foot-space. That is, the rear-gunner's brace of four cluster guns—swinging on one and the same yoke—operated not only above the ship's rear, but also down through the floor blister. So the gunner, riding the operating handle-bars, was forced to sit spread-legged and —in the case of a big guy like Lock—cramped.

However, you can't keep a good man down. Loose Lip finally jammed the kit in behind an angle-iron brace member.

"That," he said, "should be jake. I can grab any tool in the roll quicker'n'you can say—MrLockyou'reaniceman."

Somehow or other, Captain Call never questioned the sense in Loose Lip's carrying of such tools. In the past, the big mac had worked aerial wonders with tools, and under conditions that would, and had, caused the pilots' hair to stand on end.

With the tool-kit disposed of, Loose Lip lounged back in his uncomfortable, high-backed saddle. That high back—between pilot and gunner—was really a sheet of armor plate, as were the sides of that long, deep cockpit.

"Man, oh man," said Loose Lip, "this is what's meant by 'no metal can touch you,' an' I used to think they was talkin' about Paris garters. An' is this hatch-cover a darb? Boy, she's the goods. One press of the control arm—whish!—and compressed air swings 'er open or closed. Wide open, Cap, when you're clearin' for action. When ya don't want no glass an' metal framework around your dome."

That was another Orr feature. The long double pit, instead of being hatched by the usual fore-and-aft-sliding cover, was fitted with a clamshell top that—with one push of the compressed-air control arm—folded away into the sides of the fuselage, or, for ordinary flight, came upward and sealed the compartment.

"It's a good free-action pit," Captain Call said. "A man could get out of this with a chute. We can't say that for all the new jobs.

"Hey! Where do you think you're going, Mike me boy?"

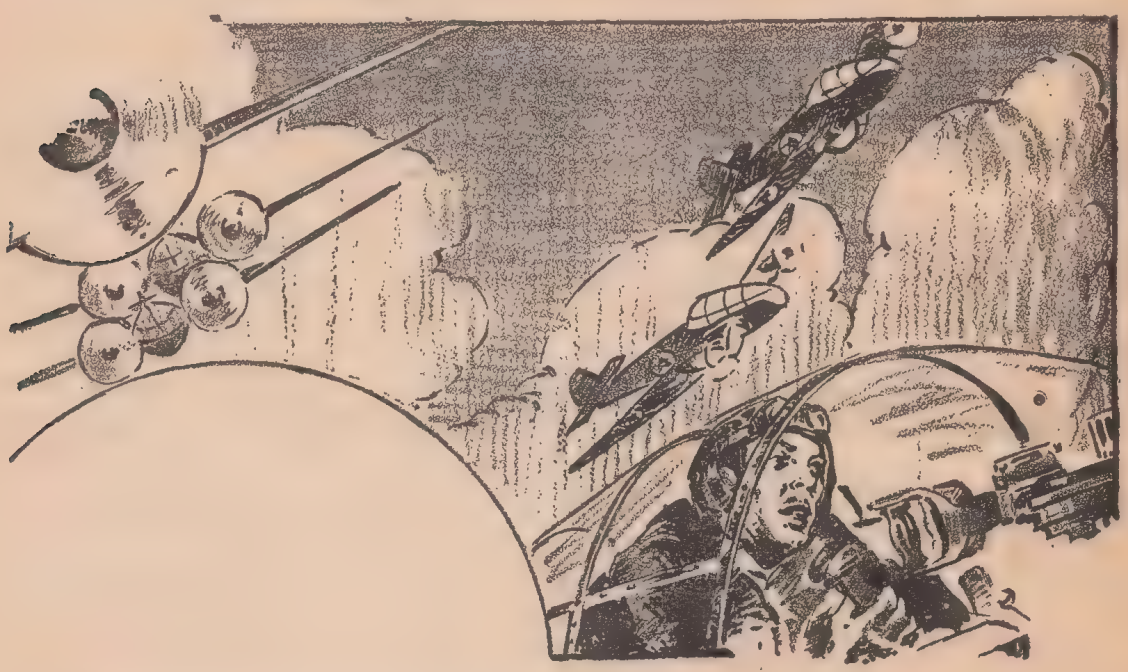
That last, sudden hail and question—by Captain Call—was directed in the general direction of Captain Mike O'Shea. O'Shea, just passing the tail of No. 1 Bushmaster, looked up, waved something toward Call, and said, "Oh, hello, feller. I want to see you. Be right back in a shake." Then he waved that something again, and added, "Wait just a shake till I hang my lucky rabbit's foot in the pit of my ship."

"Oh-o, what's wrong with Mike?"

Captain Mike O'Shea, rabbit foot dangling in his right hand, had arrived alongside his Bushmaster—ship No. 2. Mike was just about ready to fly, as he stood.

That is, he was wearing the cumbersome, electrically-heated coveralls that go with altitude work. Also, his feet were incased in the clumsy elephant boots that go with that cold-weather equipment.

He made a stretching reach—with his



Loose Lip Lock, watching O'Shea go, grinned and said, "O'Shea an' that dam' old rabbit foot of hisn! That's the dam' suspicious Irish for you. Mike had that same rabbit foot in his cockpit when he cracked up, here on Federal, 'bout a year ago an' busted that left leg. An' the laughs on him. That ain't even a hind leg—but a front—say nothin' of not bein' a left hind of a graveyard rabbit.

"Haw-haw, hell," Loose Lip laughed. "Mike can't have no luck with a leg like that. Now take me—I had a left hind leg of a rabbit that a Negro killed over in Green Grove Cemetery that I give two bucks for an'—

right hand—for the gunnel of his open cockpit. Then he put part of the big elephantine toe of his right boot into the U-iron stirrup, intending to swing his left foot up to the wing's catwalk. But just as Captain Mike O'Shea reached the halfway of that stepping-up operation, the right foot slipped off the U-iron stirrup. His left foot hadn't reached the wing. So that left foot, naturally, plopped back to earth; and, plopping back, it took the sudden full weight of heavy Mike O'Shea.

And when Loose Lip, following Mike's action, said, "Oh-o, what's wrong with Mike?", Mike was standing hard up against the side of his ship, head down, eyes on the

ground, and his whole weight on the right foot now.

Captain Call knew what was wrong with Mike O'Shea. And when he rushed over and threw a supporting arm under Mike's midriff, that hard-luck holder of a good-luck charm turned an ashen face toward Call and Loose Lip. The sweat of pain was standing out on his stiffened upper lip and under his eyes.

"It's gone again, broken again, that dam' left ankle!" he said. "Oh, the damned so-and-so thing! Wait just a shake—wonder if it will take my weight? Oh, hell, man, that. Look. Could you two get me aboard this front pit, and—?"

"Hell no, Mike," Captain Call objected. "You couldn't fly a ship with this ankle. You're washed out, soldier. You've got to take it. Come on, let's get down to the post hospital. Get a field-service car, Lockie."

Major Trump rushed out, saw what he'd come to see, then tore his hair.

"Tough break, O'Shea. Tough break," he said. "But it's just one of those things, I suppose."

When Captain Mike O'Shea was loaded aboard the small field-service truck, alongside the driver on the front seat, he turned to that driver and hissed—between teeth that were biting down hard against pain—"Pull over and park on the apron. Over there against the hangar. I'm going to see this flight get off the ground.

"How about it, Call—are you hopping No. 2?"

"That's what I was just going to suggest," Captain Call answered. "You couldn't call it robbery, could you, Mike?"

"You're hired on, Captain," Major Trump decided. He glanced at his watch again. "She's getting up there toward three," he then said. "Better shake a leg and climb into your duds. Wear the works, Captain. We're going way up there. Way up past thirty thousand—where it's cold and rare—before we turn east and sneak across the shoreline. Yes, sir, we eat oxygen today. Lots of it.

"Good-by, O'Shea. Sit tight and hold to that rabbit's foot for us."

"Rabbit's foot be damned!" said O'Shea, suddenly discovering that he still held the small furry thing clutched tightly in his right hand. "The old lady always warned me that I'd come to no good, holding truck and shift with heathen superstitions. Oh, the damned bad-luck hind hoof of a graveyard hedge-jumper."

"Irish," Loose Lip snapped, "I told you a hundred times, even before you cracked up a year ago, that it ain't a hind foot. That's where you've been makin' your big mistake all along. Now you take this here hind leg of a graveyard clover mule that I carry, this here—"

"Don't you bring that damned thing aboard my ship, Lock!" Major Trump wailed, taking one look at the frayed furry bit that Loose Lip had just dug up from way down in the hind pocket of his pants.

CHAPTER XIII

TAKE-OFF AT THREE

AT TEN minutes of three fifty-two thousand horsepower was revving out there on the starting apron. All of Aviation Section shook and vibrated; and the mighty roar swelled even beyond the mile on mile of Federal Proving Ground's far-flung reservation.

The three flights of circling fighter planes circled a bit wider—making plenty free room for the ships that would be coming up soon—and took on a little more altitude.

Then, a few minutes before three, No. 1 ship led off, the twelve trailed behind and followed, and the Bushmaster flight went downwind and came into take-off formation at the far end of the east-west runway. Then all that hellish roar of revving power fell back to a steady, rolling throb. All eyes were on the tower.

At three sharp, the tower flashed the green. Major Trump turned for one last glance at his company, raised a right hand, grinned a broad grin, dropped the arm forward; and the Atlantic charge was under way. Federal watched them make a climb that was nothing short of a long-distance zoom. No circling for altitude for those babies. And before that zoom-climb had ended, thirteen Bushmasters were small specks high in the sky—perhaps less than a mile west of the hangars but at close to 15,000 altitude.

Then the three fighter squadrons came in closer, one at either side and the third bringing up the rear. Trump's flight flew a quick right turn—all thirteen in close formation—and cut for the north. All ships were climbing, climbing hard, and after a few minutes Federal Proving Ground saw nor even heard them no more.

Up to 20,000, and past 25,000, and all craft were then walking on the ceiling through benefit of turbosupercharger. And each airman in the four fighter groups was eating oxygen—living and breathing behind those man-from-Mars masks that make a Frankenstein of a harmless guy like Loose Lip Lock or Captain Call. Masks through whose spade-handle opening the mouth is free to talk—man to man or via ship's phone—or drink hot java from thermo bottles, or spit at the enemy.

At 30,000 feet—when New York City and the Bay was going under the right wings in the distant mists—Trump & Co. began to kiss the boys good-by. That is: the boys belonging to those other three flight groups. Oh, those others could top the 30,000 mark, but not the way Orr Bushmasters shove altitude down and away. So Loose Lip Lock and those other twelve aft-facing gunners began waving their ribbing adieus. And because all pursuit pilots are on the thin-skinned side, the leaders of those three escorting flights, signaling one after the other, flew their turns and abandoned the escort.

With the New York City area lost from sight, Major Trump, too, made a signal for a turn. And the Bushmasters passed out to sea. They were flying at 38,000 feet then. No earthly eye or ear, if by chance any Axis observers were watchful on that East Coast at the time, either saw or heard that shoreline crossing.

At three-thirty, Major Trump took a station-to-ship contact from the storage hangar radio room. The Signal Corps sergeant, making the contact, reported that his listening post had just picked up Berlin's night short-wave broadcast of news items. The Berlin newscaster, quoting Dr. Goebbels, announced that the world would have a surprise, not even second to that surprise promised before the paratroop invasion of Crete. This super-surprise, attesting to the invincible prowess of Nazi arms, would be forthcoming before another sun had risen over Germany. Following the surprise, the Fuehrer would speak to his people—and to all the world—over the radio.

Major Trump signaled all ships for a ship-to-ship hook-up, then relayed those glad Nazi tidings.

The twelve other ships listened—the pilots taking it and then man-to-man relaying the news back to the gunners—then all twelve began to do a crazy war dance of wing-wiggling as an aerial razzberry for one Adolf Hitler.

Loose Lip Lock, gazing over to where Captain Call rode in No. 2, just right and aft of No. 1's right wing's tip, pinched his nose-cover. Captain Call got the signal a bit wrong. He thumbed his own nose at Loose Lip. Loose Lip brought his four-gun cluster up and began framing Call in the gun-sight.

Pretty soon, Major Trump looked around, then, laughing, spoke to Loose Lip via ship's phone.

"Call says you're making him and his gunner nervous, Lock. Why must you play rough? . . . Oh, he did, eh? . . . Thumbed his nose at us, you say? . . . Go ahead, shoot the bugger down.

"Lock, I'm feeling my spring wheat. Everything look okay to you? All motors running smokeless, aren't they? Guess you won't need that tool-kit this hop."

"Right," Loose Lip answered. "But I won't toss it overside just yet. Hey, that Call gent's thumbin' his beezer at us again!"

Major Trump didn't answer. Loose Lip glanced ahead over his shoulder. Trump was making notes on a knee pad. Loose Lip knew that he was taking another radio flash.

Making his ship-to-ship broadcast again, Trump said:

"Another little item from Storage. A navy craft on the Bermuda-Newfoundland Patrol reports that the big thirty-two have crossed that line. They're now at about 15,000 feet. That sounds just about right, since they've flown off some of that fuel load.

"Crossing that line, just a few minutes ago puts them right on time. Gentlemen, we should make the rendezvous just about where we planned it. We're on time too. And say—New York is at air-raid alert."

When the wing-wiggling war dance had subsided again, Loose Lip Lock phoned Trump once more.

"That man's in again," he said. "The Call person is doin' it some more. My ma used to say that nose-thumbin' had a double meanin', that it stood for a dirty word. Call better mean that for Hitler, or else—damned if I don't shoot him down!"

CHAPTER XIV

TIME TO WORRY

WHEN four o'clock was on the instrument-board's clock, the Bushmasters were so far at sea that no sign of land showed above the horizon mists in the west; and the east was vast and empty. Not even a cloud stood between their whirling props and the place where sky and sea drew their keen, chill meeting line.

The flight was working in the conventional V formation. Trump's No. 1, of course, was flying the point. The right and left echelons of six ships each fell backward and upward from Trump's low point. And, as from the beginning, the V was close.

After Major Trump's last relay of Focke-Wulf position, and with the passing of four o'clock, Major Trump got down to business. Over the ship-to-ship radio, Trump now spoke almost constantly with Captain Call and Lieutenant Nanton. Nanton, flying Bushmaster No. 7, was one of the best aerial navigators in the group. Navigation was highly important now.

So Trump, Call and Nanton checked and rechecked, then, at about four-thirty, finally agreed that they were riding eastward on the same parallel as that being followed westward by the Focke-Wulf pack—this position of latitude being based on the reading stated by that Newfoundland-Bermuda Patrol observer.

After satisfying himself of the position, Major Trump once more signaled for a ship-to-ship huddle via two-way radio.

"We're on the ball, gentlemen," he said; "but we don't want anybody running our ends. Therefore, from now on, we'll go onto a wide front. Also, we'll drop off some of this altitude—maybe down to 30,000. For the next little while, till further notice, we'll space about two miles between ships. Then all eyes on the lower half."

Ending his conversation, Major Trump nosed down a bit. At the same time, he killed off some of his speed. All other ships broke formation and gave way to either right or left. A minute later and all thirteen were on a twenty-four-mile company front; and the altimeters read 30,000 feet.

Then everybody was on the ball. Thirteen pilots studied the sky ahead. Thirteen gunners checked and double-checked on the sky that had gone behind.

Five o'clock came. Glancing over his shoulder, Loose Lip could see that Major Trump was beginning to worry. Trump was doing a problem in navigation—just to make doubly sure—studying the compass—perhaps beginning to question that instrument—and jotting the findings on his knee pad. Then he'd talk with Captain Call again. And have another check-up with Nanton.

At five-fifteen, getting them all on the ship-to-ship once again, Major Trump said, "We'll spread it out a bit thinner, men. Let's put about four miles between ships. And keep the eye peeled."

A minute later the thirteen Bushmasters had spread wide and reestablished a new company front, this time on a line of observation that approximated forty-eight or fifty miles.

Along toward half past five, Major Trump forged out front for a few miles, gave a wing signal, then took the whole flight closer to the sea. Twenty-five-thousand feet was the altimeter reading when he once more brought his group back to level cruising.

Five-thirty was just about the outside—as Trump had had the time element figured. Fact is, five-thirty was so close to being *outside* that outside that Trump was in a sweat. Seldom in a lifetime would a man in his position sit in such a spot, a spot wherein a miss was verily as good as a mile—or any number of miles, up to a million, on that damned, over-size Atlantic. Why, oh why in hell, did they want to make oceans so large! So large that thirty-two big Focke-Wulfs could be so small that twenty-six good pair of Yank eyes might miss them. Miss their passing and never again get a chance to even the score—or, worse, be able to explain why they missed.

FOR a minute or two, somewhere along in that space of lost hope, Major Trump must have abandoned confidence in his own ability to figure a position. Perhaps, also, he might have wondered whether Call and Nanton knew as much as they were credited with in Air Forces circles.

Trump contacted Call and Lieutenant Nanton, saying, "This doesn't look any too good from where I sit. Is there just a chance that the Focke-Wulfs have been scared off by the radio and wireless activities? Isn't there an off chance that they've given away, north and west, for a try on Halifax? Wouldn't that be a logical change? We can't hold to this line much longer. I think we'd better ease off to the left and take a chance landward—toward Nova Scotia."

CAPTAIN CALL, perhaps forgetting young Major Trump's recent boost in rank, said, "Steady, Trump. Steady. We're on the course."

Young Nanton spoke in, saying, "I'm certain we are, Major Trump."

"But damn it, men!" Major Trump answered. "Perhaps the Focke-Wulfs are no longer on that course. Get my point? Hell, I don't doubt you two. But something's got to be done."

Even while Trump was saying that, his No. 1 Bushmaster was crowding out ahead of the company front. Trump, soon a full three miles ahead of that long front, had actually begun his wing-dip, for a left turn, when a new voice cut in on the ship-to-ship radio.

"Dell speaking," the voice said. "Dell, in No. 12 reporting what we're looking for—just going past my end of this front. What we're looking for is perhaps eight or ten miles from this end."

Lieutenant Dell was piloting the very end ship, the Bushmaster at the far southern tip of the company front. Trump's blood had a right to run cold then. The biggest ship—even a B-19—shrinks to a very small speck when sighted from a point ten or twelve miles away. Add that distance to the fact that the Focke-Wulfs were wearing the best of sea-going war paint, and flying with the Atlantic's blue as a

background, and it all adds up to a piece of ship sighting worthy of medals.

CHAPTER XV

THE BUSHMASTERS STRIKE

INSTEAD of finishing the left-turn signal, Major Trump wiggled an "As you were!", then dropped a wing for a right swing.

Swinging right, Trump brought his flight southward in a long turn. He—and perhaps none of the others—had as yet picked up what Dell had seen. But if Dell said the enemy was there, to the south, then the enemy was there. And Major Trump wanted to come up from behind—now that the sun was low in the west—and give that Focke-Wulf no sudden cause for panic.

Coming around in the big sweep, Major Trump once more brought all pilots in on the ship-to-ship radio.

"We'll close ranks, men," he ordered. "Lieutenant Dell, you'll move off in that direction alone and keep your eye on what you've seen. Be there to point the way when we come up."

Dell's No. 12 fell away from the south tip of the company front that had already started to break up. When Dell put his bow on the far-distant what-he-had-found, the others took their look down that way. One by one they spotted what none but tip-top flying eyes could see. The Focke-Wulfs were in two lines of sixteen each. The lines had no particular design of formation. One string of the big group trailed the other by perhaps a space of three miles. There was no indication of any changes being made in those two easy-flying fronts. So it was pretty certain that the oncoming, V-forming Bushmasters had not been sighted. Which was as it should be.

"Warm up those guns, Gentlemen," Major Trump ordered over the ship-to-ship. "Take safety off air anchors and wing brakes."

Each pilot spoked his gunner and said, "The C. O. says to warm 'em up."

Gunner Loose Lip Lock didn't frame Captain Call in his gun-sight when he rode the handlebars and blipped a few warming blips of that deadly four-gun cluster. Instead, Loose Lip sent the tracers down through the belly blister—into the Atlantic.

Each gunner reported back: Guns O. K., sir.

Each pilot spoke Major Trump: All guns O. K., sir.

The Bushmasters were ready. And the Bushmasters were also back in tight formation again, Dell's No. 12 having shown the way, then returned to its outside-right position.

Trump had held his forming flight back until a full ten miles stood between them and the rear line of the Focke-Wulf group. The Bushmasters were at 27,000 feet when the V was in perfect echelons again; and there was nothing now but to close with the enemy.

"We'll give it a try, men," Major Trump said. "Thoughtful of them to set 'em up in two rows like this. When we go into the dive, we'll spread on company front again. The thirteen Focke-Wulfs on the right of the set-up will be our first shots. Each man takes his enemy ship according to position. After the first rush, ships on my right will remain to gang up on any Focke-Wulf that didn't go down with that opening burst. Ships on my left will turn away and take on the three Focke-Wulfs that were slighted. Ships on my left, ride your port air anchors on that turn-off—it will hold you for a pivot turn-back to the enemy's rear. That's what your anchors are for. Says Bill Orr."

Major Trump paused for another closer study of the enemy. The gap between had been reduced to a scant five miles by then; and still there was no sign of Focke-Wulf change of line. The Bushmasters had not been seen.

The Bushmasters were down at 24,000,

and with speed coming up to almost the diving rate; though the hard dive wasn't under way just yet. As for the Focke-Wulfs, they were at about 14,000 feet.

Trump spoke again, saying, "After polishing off the rear line, this flight reorganizes. Get that? We pull out and form for the second attack. It isn't likely that the front group of Focke-Wulfs will carry on as set-ups. So we'll have to take our time and plan the polish-off for them.

"Hatches open for action! . . . Warm those guns again! Come up on a front with me! . . . Now give 'em hell! Yell your fool heads off and dive! . . . And it's for Pearl Harbor and Hickam!"

Then the Bushmasters were on a company front again. Full gun was on every motor's throttle. All bows were down. The kill dive was under way.

The last few miles of space was no space at all for ships that could tear off better than six miles per minute in easy flight, and close to ten per minute when the pilot was standing on his rudder pedals and looking straight along the nose into the ground—or sea.

The Focke-Wulf crews, perhaps, had never expected to meet anything like this; and it was, no doubt, entirely by accident that one rear gunner was close enough to his station to get into action before Flying Death struck.

Just one Focke-Wulf's tail blister spewed tracers, and that was all. And even his fire showed no sign of control.

Out of the hard dive, the well-flown front of thirteen came back to level keel less than a mile behind the thirteen picked victims. Then, still roaring ahead with the terrific momentum of the dive's pull-out, they closed. Now other Focke-Wulf guns were being swung into position—but not yet firing—and they weren't going to fire. Without question, those caught-napping Nazi gunners, even at that last minute, figured that they still had a pretty fair show. Their rears were armor plated. These oncoming enemy fighters must zoom—or crash them—so they'd zoom. And that's when a rear gunner gets in his best work—when the passing ship zooms its vulnerable belly skyward across the gun-sights.

Then thirteen Bushmasters dropped their Orr air anchors. All the wailing and screeching of hell filled that sky. Each pilot was applying the other Orr air brakes, too, and the terrific speed had gone out of those ships.

Anchored there, actually letting the enemy move ahead, the Yank guns were on placement. And the Yank guns were barking. Cannons and machine-guns! Each Bushmaster pouring everything it had forward into each picked victim! Tracers showing where the accurate pouring was taking place! And fire showing on first one and then the other of the Focke-Wulfs. Quick fire on fuel tanks.

Fire that took them quickly. Fire that sent crew members out of hatches and out of turrets, overside—some even without their chutes attached—and down, down into the Atlantic that was to leave no trace.

When the six right echelon Bushmasters went in to mop up on what remained of the chosen thirteen, there were only two left to offer battle. But they weren't offering it. Instead, each had started its dive. Six wheeling Bushmasters kicked off their air brakes, sucked in their Orr anchors and dived faster. Within thirty seconds those two Focke-Wulfs were going down in flames; and going down crazily, out of control.

When the left echelon Bushmasters rode their port-side anchors in quick turn—having sucked in the right-side anchor—and whirled away to close with the three Focke-Wulfs that had been slighted in that first rush, something had quickly taken the detail out of their hands.

Being so suddenly jumped, the Focke-Wulf pilot third from the southern end of their front had gone panicky. Seeing what was happening, he had perhaps frozen for a few seconds, maybe bug-eyed at that display of new enemy equipment. When he

did move, he moved in all directions. He pulled away from all that hell—over to the left—and rammed the next Focke-Wulf in line. Being so near to the bombing area—New York City—all bombs must have been carrying their war heads. All bombs let go when the ship crashed its mate head-on. The second ship's cargo blew, too. And the third ship—the one on the southern tip of the Focke-Wulf line—weathered a barrage of flying junk for only a few seconds, then lost its entire tail service. It went down toward the Atlantic. And going, it whipped itself to pieces before a mile of the 14,000-foot fall had been disposed of.

Bringing in his air anchors, riding clear and wide of the mop-up area, Major Trump spoke to Loose Lip on the ship's phone.

"How d'ya like them alley apples, Lock?" he asked.

"Swell!" enthused Loose Lip. "But what is this—a pilot's war? Warm 'em up, sez you; an' then I don't even get a chance to use 'em. Guess I'll have to shoot Cap Call after all."

Chapter XVI

THE LUFBERY CIRCLE

THE leading line of sixteen Focke-Wulfs had shown several rapid reactions during the brief minute of utter disaster that had come down on their now-defunct rearmost half. First, the sixteen had broken badly. Next, two or three had flown tight turns, heading back toward the fray. Thirdly, nearly all others had put the nose down and started hell-bent for the sea.

But by the time Major Trump had reformed his V of thirteen Bushmasters—at 14,000 elevation—the Focke-Wulf group was back under orders again—down at about 9,000—and working into something nearing formation. They knew that separate flight meant quick death.

The Bushmasters, holding off and circling wide, were a good half-dozen miles north and east of the Focke-Wulfs. Major Trump said, "Let's have a ship report. Everybody as he should be?"

One by one each pilot reported his ship's readiness for the next step. None had been hit. All equipment was okay.

"Swell!" said Trump. "Now do you see what I see?"

The V had its sharp point aimed toward the down-under Focke-Wulf group when Trump asked that. All pilots took a long look at what the major was studying closely.

"That, gentlemen, is ye olde Lufbery circle. And that, gentlemen, is reputed one hard nut to crack. Let's talk this thing over."

The Focke-Wulfs, realizing that thirteen fighter ships was altogether too many fighter ships for sixteen cumbersome, slower flying boats, had used their heads and gone into a Lufbery circle. Each following the others tail, all sixteen were on the big merry-go-round. And the diameter of that circular course was, perhaps, not more than the length of a good-size city block. That made of it a mighty fast party. Put sixteen 230-mile ships on a turntable like that and they're likely to brush off anything that tries to come aboard the edge of that whirling wheel. Especially when the whirling edge is heavily gunned—fore, aft and broadside of each ship. Even lightly armed—as Trump said—the Lufbery circle has always been a cornered air squadron's best line of defense. The Lufbery circle is air's hollow square, the one place where out-gunned flightmates can draw up and make a stand.

"Right now," Major Trump said, speaking to all ships, "the Nazis would give us odds that they've out-smarted us. See how they've got it figured? They can stay right there, circling, till darkness comes. Or till shortage of fuel drives us out of the game.

"Right they are, too, for my fuel gauges show that nearly half of the supply is gone. Give me a report on that—how are the rest of you on fuel?"

Trump kept silent then while each pilot made his report. Each was down close to the halfway mark, but none under.

"Okay, we're on the safe side—if we don't spend too much time watching that Lufbery and growing dizzy," Major Trump then said. "Any suggestions?"

Captain Call said, "Don't play with that buzz saw just for the hell of it, Major. That's hot! Burny-burny, if we don't watch out!"

Each of the other pilots said something like, "It's your birthday cake, sir. Tell us how you want it cut."

"So you won't help the old man with the chores?" Major Trump groused. "All right, see if I care. Well, anyway, I have me an idea all my own. So listen. If we crash that party as expected, some of you men are not going to keep dates tonight. That's sure.

"Now if we rush this circle from all points and fail to get our targets on that first rush, the whirling battle-wagons will surely pot us while we're hovering there at anchor. That's what a Lufbery circle is for. I don't need to explain or enlarge on that.

"So here's my plan. Me an' Adolf—that we should have it a plen!

"Now get this. We'll start this dive in formation. The dive will take us lower than the rim of that Lufbery. When we get well below, we seven ships on the point will zoom, spread ourselves along the rim—each picking a victim—drop our anchors at close range and go to work. We seven outer-rim boys will do our best to do all gunning upward, with bows high.

"Now when we zoom for the rim, the six rear ships, three on each echelon, will carry on under the near side of the Focke-Wulf wheel. Those six will bust across under, up and into the circle proper. You six will then drop anchors and go to work on the Focke-Wulfs on the far side—the south rim—of the gay whirl. So fly it carefully, you who go up and in there, pick each a ship as best you can, and we seven will do our damnedest to keep our fire angled high. But if we get you six in our cross-fire, don't be sore. Remember we were only fooling.

"Now, finally, all pilots! Pass the word to your gunners that all contributions will be gladly received. Tell them that it's their war, too. My man Lock threatens to shoot some of you if he can't warm his guns on Nazis.

"One more word, and then to work. When we break them up this time, stay with it. Mop up, each man to his liking. That sun is sneaking out on us. So is the fuel. We don't want to swim the last few miles home, you know. Warm the guns! Hatches open! Let's go, America! And keep 'em flying!"

Chapter XVII

BUT YANKS MUST DIE

THE Focke-Wulf gunners on the near, north side of the whirling rim opened fire when the Bushmaster V was still in its dive and far away. Those Nazis had seen just enough of the first battle to warn them that they were up against something new and different in a battle element where they used to have all the new stuff. The Focke-Wulf topside and starboard-side turrets and blisters had to handle most of the opening action. Those topside and broadside stations swung plenty of gun-fire, too. But they lost their first, opening advantage when the attacking Bushmasters dived lower than the rim—down into the big ships' dead spots—then zoomed.

And when the Bushmaster V's point of seven came up and spread, dropped their air anchors and opened guns, the thing was just a bit better than even-Steven. The Bushmaster fire was awful, and the fire-control accurate and deadly. That outer rim of the fast Lufbery circle crumbled. And even as the six rear ships went below the Focke-Wulfs under fire, the rear-seat men of the six raked the Nazis from be-

low. It was a gunner's war for sure.

Then, with anchors screeching into full bloom along their hundred feet of cable, the six came to placement within the Lufbery circle and smashed the far side point-blank. And insofar as the circle was flying its course contraclockwise, the Nazi gunners were prepared and watching only for starboard-side attack. Now, with all hell bursting from below and to port, the south-rim Focke-Wulfs never had a Chinaman's chance. It was over with a smash. The fire power of the Bushmasters' nose cannons was more than any flying shell could withstand.

And fire was aboard at least three of those far-side Focke-Wulfs before their flying momentum had time to take them into a running dive.

Major Trump, smashing upward against the outer rim, made a direct cannon hit on a fuel tank of the big Nazi boat that happened to be in what you might call the 9 o'clock position of that contraclockwise whirl. At the same time, Trump glanced away to the east—to his left—and saw first tragedy strike into the Bushmaster ranks.

He saw No. 7 Bushmaster take a direct hit and go away in flames, flames that smothered the compact fighter from bow to tail with one hellish burst. That was Lieutenant Kane in No. 7. Kane, being in the furthest left of the seven rim-attacking ships, was in a very hot spot from the opening gun. He was in a place where he had to expect one if he gave one; and the man did both. The one he took—no doubt a Focke-Wulf bow cannon-shot — came from a Nazi boat that was riding the big east curve when the operation started. That is, this particular Focke-Wulf was one of the lucky few that was being attacked neither by the rim-crashers or by the six that pushed under and upward into the center. And swinging around that big east bent, that Focke-Wulf had the best gun position possible. Well, it used that position of vantage. And Lieutenant Kane and his gunner never even got out of their seats.

Getting that horrible eyeful, Trump sucked in his right-side air anchor with a zip, allowed the left-side anchor to drag, then flew a steep turn toward where Kane's No. 7 had been. And even as he wheeled, Loose Lip Lock cracked down an another undamaged, fire-spitting Focke-Wulf that had decided to cut a cord across the east side of the Lufbery—omitting the 11 and 10 o'clock parts of the contraclockwise circuit. And when Loose Lip met that oncoming Focke-Wulf, he matched it gun for gun—all four cluster guns for everything that big job carried in its frontal attack. And the big Nazi job was the one that came off second best.

Major Trump, telling about it later, was to say, "Lock sent up such a blood-curdling Comanche yell that, for a second, I thought my right-side anchor had slipped its brake and was whistling aft by mistake. Man, I don't mind battle, but yelling such as that can be just simply too, too damned much!"

Telling it to some, also later, Trump was to add, "But the big guy sure saved my hide and hair. For a fact—that Focke-Wulf, cutting the cord like that, certainly caught old man Trump with his soft side up. Yes, sir, my wing surfaces were filling that Focke-Wulf's gun-sights, and nary a gun had I that could be brought to bear on any part of that big ark. Lock always earns his keep on any trip."

HAVING earned his keep on that trip, Loose Lip Lock took out the last free-wheeling Focke-Wulf in that section of the sky. So, still riding the drag of his left air anchor, Major Trump whirled round in a full, sharp turn. Then, studying the set-up where things were still happening to the west and south, he reeled in that last air anchor and went back to join his flightmates in the battle royal that was shagging the last two Focke-Wulfs down toward the sea.

Two. Out of thirty-two. And even as

Trump flew in, a quick glance overside gave him and Loose Lip a view of fires that were still dropping downward through the last tough mile that would ever furnish airway for that Nazi debris. Here and there—down toward that sunset Atlantic—a few Nazi parachutes were floating. But, as Trump and Loose Lip knew, those parachuting Nazis were not going anywhere. Just out of the pan into the sea, a little matter of being choosy about the way you want to die.

CHAPTER XVIII

A FINE MESS THIS IS!

MAJOR TRUMP'S flight orders, as each man knew, were very simple: Engage the enemy and destroy without trace.

Not too drastic for an enemy that always strikes at night, usually from the air, and never with declaration of war—or a white man's warning. So only right that a Bushmaster—or a group of Bushmasters—strike that way too. Just jungle law, and it should work both ways. So Trump & Co. went directly from that opening rush into the final kill.

But there was too danged much Yank enthusiasm in the rough ganging of the last two Focke-Wulfs left alive in the inviolate western hemisphere. And so well bunched were the hell-for-leather, diving, zooming, turning Bushmasters that Major Trump was easily able to make his check-up count as he flew in to join the party. The count was eleven in the milling, and his own ship. Still a good dozen of fine craft.

One of the last two Focke-Wulfs was showing a fireball on the inside starboard motor when Major Trump arrived; and there were no fewer than four Bushmasters just coming to anchor, at either side of it, each determined to deliver the death blow. Four with air anchors standing straight out behind them! That was close, chance-taking work. So Trump dived hard, zoomed, dropped his own anchors and pressed the "works" button for all guns. And as his ship lost momentum, hung on its props for seconds, then began to flop back to even keel, Loose Lip dragged the big enemy with all four cluster guns. The Focke-Wulf was no longer a contender—but just a cargo of fire going someplace to quench itself in the Atlantic.

Right away, even before Major Trump could redress his line of flight, the four ships that had ganged that second last Focke-Wulf were high-tailing toward the last, lone representative of the Nazis. Trump knew full well that this was too dangerous. The seven wolf-packing that Focke-Wulf were enough and plenty for the job. Add four more wild ones to the mêlée and you'd be asking for it—for disaster in your own ranks.

Trump went to work on his ship-to-ship radio.

"Don't go in there, you last four ships!"

But the last battle was under way fully two thousand feet lower than the elevation at which Trump and the four had just polished off their prey. And the four were under way and in the hard, full-of-business dive when the major gave that order. Furthermore, it's just likely that all four didn't hear or notice the order. Two, though, did make some change of direction. They were ships No. 3 and 11. No. 3 veered left and circled wide of the mêlée. No. 11 shoved his control column ahead, dived even steeper, then cut the big dip southward directly below all that hell on wings.

Suddenly, before Trump could come alongside, all that hell on wings came to an end. The last Focke-Wulf was on its way down. Bushmasters were pulling in their anchors, darting and zooming their way out of those close quarters, and working away toward freer sky space.

Freer sky space! Ye gods, here are two that need free sky space—and lots of it. The two ships were Captain Call's No. 2 and Lieutenant Pierce's No. 11. When

they came into the clear, way over on the far southeast side of where the thing was breaking up, they came out tied together by air-anchor cables. It was as plain as the self-awarded medals and sunbursts on Goering's matronly bosom: No. 11, when Pierce took it under the mêlée in that long dip dive, wasn't heeding Major Trump's warning at all. Instead, the gay young blade was just trying to repeat what Major Trump had just accomplished on that second-last Focke-Wulf. He was intent upon cheating the original seven to the death blow by getting in a belly shot at the big job. And that might have been all fine and dandy were it not for the fact that an older hand—Captain Call—was taking care of that well-established aerial-warfare department when young Pierce zoomed and dropped his air anchors.

Call's No. 2, at that exact split second, was beginning to whip-stall out of the belly attack. Pierce saw his big mistake just in time to apply all braking devices, drop his zooming nose, and try to fall away from Call's No. 2. But when No. 11 fell away, the blast of its blip-blipping reduced throttle blew Pierce's right-side air anchor across Call's left air-anchor cable. And, being just cables, they did as cables always will—threw a few turns of each other over the other. And two Bushmasters, with two good airmen putting everything on the ball, came out into open space tied neatly together, flying wing-tip to wing-tip.

Ten other Bushmasters worked in alongside, atop and below, while twenty onlooking airmen studied that picture and wondered what could be worse. What could be worse with fuel half gone, hundreds of miles of Atlantic to be flown, and a sun just halving itself on the western line that marked the passing of day and the coming of darkness?

Call and Pierce, of course, could carry on as Siamese twins for some time. But they couldn't carry on and gun those ships to Bushmaster speed. And nothing but Bushmaster speed could be expected to get the flight back to shore before dark. What's more the fuel supply would not allow for a long, dragged-out cruise. And worse yet, with hundreds of miles before them, the job of jockeying tied-together ships for the whole distance was too great a physical strain for any man. Even if they did get back to dry land, no two pilots could set down under such conditions at Bushmaster speed.

Speaking over his ship-to-ship, Major Trump said, "Now you two know how Adolf feels with big Joe's nose between his teeth. He's still top man, but let's see him let go.

"But hold what you've got, Captain Call, and you too, Pierce, there must be some way out of this. Any good suggestions from other listeners-in?"

Before any watchful, thinking listeners-in could throw either light or hope on the present, Major Trump two-wayed:

"Hold it, men. . . . Lock has an idea."

Over his ship-to-ship, Captain Call spoke for the first time since getting into trouble. He said, "That's good enough for me, Major. Please go to work on that idea."

Now kneeling on his seat, leaning ahead and yelling into Trump's right ear, Loose Lip said, "These cables are each a hundred feet long. Allowing for the tie-up turns, they's maybe 190 feet between Call's left motor nacelle and No. 11's right motor. There's about fifteen or eighteen feet of wing-end overhang on each ship to be cut off that 190 foot reckonin'. Say we have close to 140 feet of clear cable stretch between their wing tips. . . ."

"Right. Go ahead, Lock," Trump urged.

"Well, the Bushmaster wingspan is only 65 feet. You've got room to spare if you crowd in between 'em."

"And let them step out and stroll across our wings to this pit? There's no room for four poor relations in this house," Trump said. Loose Lip, for once, wasn't kidding. He said, "You crowd under the cable an' in between 'em. Then, when your props are

out front of their wing-tips, you tell Call an' No. 11 to fly on you. Tell 'em to bring that cable down an' into my hands.

"That's all, brother! Let's go!"

Major Trump relayed that plan to Captain Call and Pierce.

Captain Call said, "All right if Lockie says so, but these cables are stout, and Lockie's teeth aren't as young as they used to be. It will be a good bite if he makes it. I'm ready."

"Ready here, sir," Lieutenant Pierce added. "I'll do my best, sir, but this job is wearing me down fast."

"I'm on my way through the tunnel, gentlemen," Major Trump then made known. Already his air anchors were trailing; and the wing brakes were in full deflection. His cruising speed was very low for a Bushmaster. And then his wing-spread was suddenly between the rudders of No. 2, on the right, and No. 11 to the left.

A little lower than the other two, Trump forged out ahead. Then, holding to straight flight, still stalling down to a stagger, he spoke the ship-to-ship once more: "Okay, airmen. It's up to you. You're flying on me. Bring that cable down. Put it in Lock's hands. Steady as you come!

A two-pilot piece of close air-work was under way then. Bringing that tangled length of air-anchor cables in and down to Loose Lip's hands, Captain Call and young Pierce had to miss the high rudder-tip of Trump's Bushmaster. And when that tip was cleared, both ships had to ooze lower, as one—then avoid cutting Loose Lip's head off because of ship's action beyond their control.

"Coming on you steady, Major Trump," Captain Call said. "Coming down. We're over the rudder. Steady yourself now! Lockie's reaching. He's got it. And—"

Trump didn't notice what Call added to that "and—." But he did hear Loose Lip yell to high heaven again; and Loose Lip yelled, "Take 'em away, pilots!"

Call and Pierce took 'em away. And each—pushing full throttle to his motors—went right and left out of that huddle as though they never wanted to sit in on a ship huddle again.

So the Bushmasters were back in formation again, tightening up the well-formed V and heading for home.

And pretty soon Major Trump took a call from Captain Call, then, in turn, spoke via ship's phone back to Loose Lip.

"Captain Call," the major said, "says he'll buy the new store teeth if you broke any on that bite."

"Bite me eye!" said Loose Lip. "You tell the Cap what I said to him when you first landed in on Federal with a Bushmaster. I told the Cap then that anythin' could happen when ol' Bill Orr thunk up a ship with sky hooks an' air anchors.

"An', brother, I sez to myself, ol' Bill Orr ain't gonna pull none of his flyin'-circus stuff on Old Man Lock's bright son of a son. Say, when that Orr guy begins monkeyin' with baby's duds hung out to dry on a steel cable, it's time for the civvie macs to get set. I was set, Trump. I had me own small cable-cutters with me from the start. Here they are. See 'em?"

Major Trump turned and took his look at Air Force's now-famous cable-cutters. And, at the same time, Loose Lip waved them high so's Call could see them too.

A few minutes later, after holding a ship-to-ship gabfest, Major Trump once again spoke to Loose Lip.

"Lock," he said, "we just decided to take this flight into Mitchel Field for the night. Darkness will be crowding us pretty close even when we get there, say nothing of going all the way to Federal. Anyway, I figure that a New York post owes this flight one good meal. Mitchel's officers' mess is very choice."

"Never mind the officers' mess," Loose Lip talked back. "Just set me down at any one of the barracks, with the enlisted stiffs. Them's the boys I fly for best. An' have I got some flyin' to do for them guys tonight!"

If You Know When to Be Brave and When to Be Scared You Won't Be So Likely to Screw Up the Works

LOOSE ENDS

By RICHARD SALE

WITH me it's a complex. If there's anything I can't stand, it's a guy who's dumb and covered with loose ends. Before I busted my right pin and had to quit the job while I mended—it took some time and mending—I was chief inspector in the plant, I was the guy with the micrometers and the calipers who checked the measurements. So I tended to be precise and sort of careful. I, which is Nucky Johnson, have found out that it is always the dumb bunny who screws up the works because he doesn't think a thing out, carefully, and he doesn't know when to be smart, and he doesn't know when to be brave and when to be scared.

Yet all my life, it seems like every time I turn around, I pick up another one. A dog, a dame, a guy, it makes no difference. They always think I'm the boss and they're always dumb. And I'm the nursemaid who takes the tin can off their tails and tries to show them that two and two makes four. Me, of all guys, who can't stand a stoop and who gets sore when a guy don't use his head.

When I saw this chance to get a good job and hot pay as a ground man in a British air squadron, me having shop experience and knowing the inside of engines like a dentist knows a tooth, I signed up and figured I'd be living with officers and gents for a change where stupidity paid off in lilies. So what happens? The day we leave the British Consulate in New York for Halifax, Nova Scotia, where we was to take a ship, who ties onto my tail but Big Red Boyers.

Big Red had been a steamfitter, and he

was a passable mechanic. He was tall and broad with carrot-colored hair and a lantern jaw and a idiot's grin. "Hey," he said, slapping my back, "ain't you Nucky Johnson?"

"So what if I am?" I snapped. "You don't have to bust my back."

"Gee, I'm sorry, Nucky," Big Red said. "I didn't mean to bust your back. I'm only glad to see you. I went to the Industrial School on DeKalb in Brooklyn same time as you, remember me?"

"No," I said. "And I'm just as glad."

He laughed at what was no joke and said, "You going over for a slap at Shicklegruber?"

"Schicklegruber?" I said.

"Sure, Adolph Schicklegruber. I don't call him Hitler any more because a guy told me if we all called him Schicklegruber which is funny, he'd be a laughing stock and he would lose the war sooner."

"Listen, Red," I said, getting warm, "use your skull for something besides a hat. You don't make a laughing spot of a guy with as many tanks and armies and aeroplanes as Herr Schicklegruber, and you don't win a war by calling a guy any name whether it be Schnitzlehouser or Dumkopf. So we went to the same school. So I'm going to London. So what?"

"Nothing," he said subdued. "Only you and me being old pals, I figured maybe we oughta team up, Nucky. For company."

"All right," I said, because it was inevitable. "Tag along."

One was bad enough. But I was riding my luck I guess because I wound up with two. The second one was Leviticus Jones.

We went aboard the freighter up there in Halifax, and met a limey named Simms, who was in charge of us. He said, "There'll be two others in the room with you boys. Sorry, you chaps, but you'll have to share the place. Big room, y'know. And we're rather crowded. Ambulance drivers and missionaries."

"Ouch," said Big Red, "ambulance drivers for us to take in a crap game, and missionaries to make us feel ashamed of ourselves if we do. Do we gotta have missionaries, Mr. Simms? Me, when it comes to psalm singing, I get low blood pressure."

"I'm not so missionary-minded myself," I said. "And I'm not exactly ignorant like Big Red. If you'll stick a couple of psalm singers in with us, this ain't gonna be a peaceful ship."

"Now, now, you chaps," Simms said, wagging a finger. "None of that, y'know. Got to cooperate, y'know. And we didn't give you missionaries for comrades, really no. You should be quite honored. One of your cabin mates is the king's messenger, and the other is an American chap like yourselves, radio technician, going over to help locate the night bombers for us. Splendid young chap. You'll get on well, I'm sure."

"Just keep them Christian soldiers away from my door," said Big Red, "and we'll get on fine."

"What's this king's messenger stuff?" I said. "What kind of a racket is that?"

"Oh, I'm sorry," he said, smiling. "He isn't really the king's messenger. He's the American counterpart. King's messenger is a chap who delivers diplomatic papers across the seas to ambassadors in respective countries. This chap, Adams, is a state department emissary, bound for London with state department papers from Mr. Cordell Hull, I assume. That's what I meant by king's messenger."

"You meant Cordell's messenger," said Big Red with a grin. "Okay, limey boy, show us the ocean liner, lead us to it."

"Anxious to get across, eh?"

"Yes, sir," said Big Red.

"You're both mechanics, aren't you? The application here says you are engaged in the Royal Air Force as aeroplane mechanics ground crew and what not."

"That's right," I said. "We're gonna service them jobs that give the Nazis hell."

"Right-o," said Simms with a smile. "Splendid sentiment."

"Besides," said Big Red, "the pay is

good and we ain't got jobs here and we figure we might just as well get paid for a crack at Schicklegruber."

"Hitler, y'mean?"

"Don't start that again," I growled.

SO WE went aboard the ship. She was called the *Persian Sun* and she was taking on tanks and munitions and Lockhead Hudsons. She wasn't big to begin with and with all that stuff in her, it looked like she'd have the freeboard of a rowboat. They didn't pay any attention to her Plimsoll. The hell with that. They got everything in her that'd go in. They sure needed it bad. If the Persian sun ever was like the *Persian Sun,* then all I got to say is things are pretty bad in Persia. I'm no seaman, but I'd seen a lot of tubs in my time, from Hog Islanders to what used to be the S.S. *America,* and I know a hunk of tin when I see one.

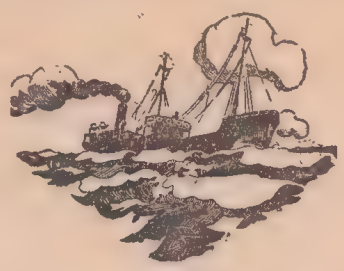
She was little and dirty and old, and I found out that once upon a time she had been a Greek and she went to Britain when the Greeks went the way of all Europe, down and out cold. Well, any time you find a ship that's a Greek, you know she's dated back to the days when steam was just coming in over sail, on account of the Greeks never bought a new ship in their lives. They just don't have the mazuma. So I told all this to Big Red and I said, "I'll lay you ten to one, Red, this tin jalopy won't never see the white cliffs of Dover this side of hell."

"G'wan, Nucky," Big Red said, "she looks okay to me, and so what? If she sinks, we can swim the rest of the way."

"You may have to do that," I said. "She's loaded and old and slow. Something tells me they'll stick this can in the tail of the convoy. You know what that means? That means if a sub comes rootin' along looking for something to chew on, we'll be it. They plug the last tubs first with the torpedoes."

"Any sub come around this ship," said Big Red waving the flag, "and we'll blow her out of the water. She's got a five inch gun on the stern. Didn't you see it, Nucky?"

"Listen, stupid," I said wearily, "why do you think they put it on the stern for?"



He just looked blank. A natural expression.

Anyway, this Simms took us to our stateroom. It was a nice big room with four bunks. Two to port, one over the other, two to starboard, one over the other. These two guys were in the place when we come in, and they'd both grabbed the lower bunks.

"Hi," I said when Big Red and me came in. "We're assigned here. Shipmates. I'm Nucky Johnson. This is Big Red Boyers. A couple of bundles for Britain."

"I'm Adams," said Cordell's errand boy. He got up and shook hands. He was a nice looking guy, a little pallid from being out of the sun too much, but kind of dignified. He was wearing a good-looking suit and his hair was gray over the ears. I guess he was a real gent. He spoke nice, he looked nice, he acted nice. He used his head.

Then the other guy got up. I thought he'd never stop getting up. He kept on getting up until I had a crick in the neck, trying to see his face. Even Big Red had to look up to him. He was a young kid, no more than twenty-four, and he had long arms and long legs and a long sad face with a thin chin and buckish teeth. His hair had a cowlick and one long strand—boy did he need a haircut—kept hanging in his eyes.

"My handle is Jones," he said. "Leviticus Jones, from Arksboro, Arkansas. Right glad to meetup with you fellas."

He extended a long big hand and we shook it. He had a fine grip and a shy kind of smile. Big Red said, "Damn if you ain't the longest boy I ever saw in my life."

"I reckon I'm quite a stretch," Leviticus said with a smile. He stuck his hands in his pockets and hung his head a little.

"That's some handle you've got," I said. "Is that out of Moses?"

"Yes, sir," he said. "But you fellas jest call me Lev. My daddy was a missionary and he got a mite religious when it came to naming his kids. But it coulda been Nebuchadnezzar. If Neb hadn't been so dog-gone evil, you might be talking with his namesake. Looka here, Mister Nucky, you're not too tall yoreself. Mebbe you'd like the lower bunk here. I can step into an upper without even hauling a deep breath."

"Thanks, kid," I said. "I'll take you up on that."

"You know who he makes me think of?" Big Red said. "He makes me think of Long Boy. Damn if he don't. I'll bet you come from a farm, don't you, Lev?"

"Yes, sir," said Lev. "But I ain't a farmer."

"Who's this Long Boy?" I said. "Who do you mean, Red?"

"Long Boy, you know. Not a guy," said Big Red. "A song. They usta sing it in the last war, I can remember plain as day. *'Good-by maw, good-by paw, good-by mule with yore ole heehaw.'*"

"I recall that one," Mr. Adams said with a chuckle. "That brings back 1917. How did the rest go? *'I may not know what the war's about but you bet by gosh I'll soon find out!'*"

"I got it now," I said. "Then it went, *'Oh, my sweetheart don't you cry, I'll bring you a—something or other—by and by—'*"

Then Lev Jones grabbed up a seedy old yellow guitar and started strumming it and he sang, finishing the ditty, "*'I'll bring you a Turk and the Kaiser too, and that's about all one fella can do.'*"

"Say!" Big Red exclaimed. "That's all right. We're gonna have a good trip over. You guys play poker?"

"I'm looking forward to taking you all," said Mr. Adams.

"I guess I can play it," said Lev.

Well, it turned out that Lev Jones was a radio amateur, one of those hams you hear on your receiver every now and then. He had had a transmitter of his own down there in Arksboro. When the British night fighters came into service with the special short wave radiolocators used to find enemy bombers at night, a call went out for radio technicians, at twenty-seven bucks a week. Lev was bound for London.

"That ain't much dough," I said.

"Twenty-seven dollars?" Lev said. "It's sure a lot where I come from. Besides, I reckon the experience is going to be worth a lot more than twenty-seven dollars. And besides that, it does a man's soul right good to help a little in the fight. My daddy did better than I'll do. My daddy was a real fighter, right at the front, and he captured eighty German soldiers once single-handed. He was quite a caution, daddy was, with a squirrel gun, so I reckon he did better with a Springfield. I ain't so bad with a good rifle myself. Maybe I can capture eighty Germans."

"Oh, lord," I said. "Another one."

"Lev just fixed my receiver here," Mr. Adams said. He had one of those portable receivers, with batteries, and we could see the back cover was off and Lev had been fiddling. "It works fine now." He turned it on, and we got some music.

"You're a pretty smart guy, Long Boy," said Big Red.

"Oh, well," said Lev, "just because I come from Arkansas, I reckon I ain't a hick. You're right smart yourself I reckon."

Oh, sure! The pot calling the kettle black. If they were smart, then I'm a hick. And I was born on Forty-second Street and Tenth Avenue.

It was a hell of a big convoy. I'd been

reading about convoys in the newspapers, just like everybody else, but I guess I always thought of them as a couple of tubs loosely bounded by a destroyer and a corvette.

Nothing like it. Not this one anyhow. It was quite a lot of steel. There were ninety ships in all in the convoy. We didn't see them all until we left Halifax harbor on the following dawn and jockeyed into position out there in the Atlantic. Like I had told Big Red, they stuck us right in the end of it. Tail End Charlie, that was us. Right where the warheads come home to roost.

Somewhere in the middle of the cluster of ships, there was a battleship. Nobody would tell you who she was, but she had a *Queen Elizabeth* look about her, like the *Malaya* or the *Warspite*. There were lots of corvettes and destroyers. Ninety ships is a lot of ship. You picture them, stretching out for miles in four columns, filling the air with their smoke, all them held down to the speed of the slowest tub, which was just about us. The *Persian Sun* had a top of twelve—they said—but she never did twelve on that trip, not with her belly full of war. If she did better than eight knots, I never knew it.

Even so, it wasn't bad. The weather was kind of thick and wet and misty the first two days, and it left all pretty clammy cold. We kept indoors all the time, and Adams played the radio while we all played poker.

Lev Jones had said he could play poker, but he played it the Arkansas way maybe. Honestly. "Jacks or better to open," I said when I dealt out the cards. Right away Lev opened, and we all chipped in. "A Jack counts ten, don't it?" Lev murmured.

"In rummy maybe," I said. "But this ain't rummy, Long Boy, this is draw poker."

"Well, I know," said Lev, "but if I have a pair of sixes like I have here, they add up to twelve and that's better than a jack because a jack is only ten. So I open."

We gave back the chips patiently. "Kid, would you like to kibitz?" I said. "I don't think you know this game."

"You're implying I'm a hick?" Lev said, his face hurt.

"I ain't implying anything," I said wearily. "Just skip it, kid, so I made a mistake. We'll deal again."

Well, I had a pretty hot hand, with a pair of aces sitting there before I even drew. On the draw, I got a pair of deuces and a trey. Big Red had hit it good, I could tell by the dopey look he got in his eyes. Then Adams dropped out, and we started betting, and pretty soon, the pot looked pretty good. The kid was still in there when Red called me. "Two pair, ace high," I said.

"Hell," said Red. "Same here, Jack high. What did you have, kid?"

"I only had three sixes," Lev said. "That only comes to eighteen points. Three times six. So I guess Nucky wins with two aces, which is thirty points, and two twos which is four more."

"Is that so?" said Big Red. "Never thought of it that way but it sounds good. I thought 3 of a kind—"

"Don't mind Red, kid," I said. "He's as dumb as you are. Three of a kind wins. It's your pot and my last game. It's a game of chance to begin with. You make it an outright gamble."

"I guess I better drop out," he said. "I don't like to look dumb."

Well, there was nothing he could do about *that*. He would look dumb as long as he lived, it was just the way he was born. But his feelings were hurt so we quit the game. He was a nice enough kid, only a stoop.

When we had lifeboat drill in the mornings, Lev always had trouble with his life preserver. He never got it on right. "Funny," he said. "I always get it on backwards. I've got to learn how. I can't swim. If we got into trouble—"

"Just put it on the other way," I said. "You can't swim?"

"No. Never learnt how," he said. "Never got a chance."

"I can swim across this whole damn ocean," said Big Red. He never even bothered with a life preserver. "I'm about the best swimmer from the Jersey shore. I swum out around Scotland lightship once and all the hell back to Sandy Hook, and that was quite a jaunt. So I'll swim for both of us comes the day."

"I wouldn't want to impose upon you," Lev said, ashamed.

"You wouldn't want to drown either, would you?" I said. "Don't be stupid."

We tried not to laugh at him, but he must have realized how ridiculous it sounded.

THE fifth day was breaking in the east when we caught it. Four of us in the end of the convoy. Wham! Wham! Wham! I heard three explosions and I sat up in the bunk. "By God!" I roared. "On your toes, you guys! There's hell and fire here! Somebody's been hit!"

Then another wham! This time it was us. The whole tub was shaken like a terrier shakes a rat. Everything shivered. We felt a blast of air that was something out of a hurricane. We saw a burst of light, everything lit up for a moment, and we heard steel singing eerily as it slapped around. I realized that I'd been kicked right out of my berth onto the floor, and there were three other guys there with me. I started yelling.

Big Red said, "Did we hit something?"

"I think we must've," said Lev.

The *Persian Sun* went over on her starboard side, thirty degrees of cant, and she never came back. Boy, she just hung there like a crooked picture. I said, "Let's get outa this death trap!"

"Wait a moment," said Adams. "My portfolio. You men, promise me something." His voice was sharp. "There is a pistol and a lot of important diplomatic papers in this portfolio. If anything should happen to me, promise me one of you will take it and carry on and keep it safe and rather than have it fall into the enemy's hands, destroy it."

"That's all right," I said. "That's a deal, Mr. Adams. My word on it. Let's blow. We gotta help those missionaries into the boats, they got a lot of women with them and they might lose their heads."

"I'll take the radio," said Lev Jones.

"I got the cards," said Big Red.

Well, the missionaries did all right. They sang Rock of Ages and they waited their turns in the boats. But there wasn't enough time. That tub had so much stuff in her, she sank like a rock.

We could feel it coming so we stopped trying to be heroes. The ship's officers had everything under control as far as possible anyhow. I spotted an empty life raft floating in the sea right below the starboard railing where we were and I pointed it out. It was daylight and growing brighter. "Guys," I said, "there it is. Let's go. It ain't more'n a fifteen foot drop at this point, and the quicker we get the hell and gone away from this ship the better. The suck'll pull us under if we stay."

"I can't swim," Lev said, appalled as he remembered it. He had forgotten his life preserver, of course. I put mine on him.

Big Red said, "Me and Long Boy goes over together, and I'll get a good grip on him so we don't lose him."

"Throw that damn radio away," I said. "It must weigh thirty pounds."

"I can't do that," he said. "We might need it."

For music while we drowned.

Big Red grabbed him and they both went over and splashed, and they came up with Red tugging the kid until they got to the raft and climbed on it. The kid still had that radio. Then Adams and me went, and when I come up, I didn't see him. Red yelled, "He didn't come up, Nucky!"

I made a surface dive for him and found one of his arms but he was heavy as a ton of bricks and I couldn't keep a grip on him. My hands slid along his bare arm until

they came to his hand, then he was gone and I had his portfolio. I hung onto that. I waited for him to show, but he never showed, and I was getting pretty pooped myself, so I hit for the raft and just about made it. Red and the kid hauled me aboard. Then we paddled off a little fast as we could and we watched the last of the *Persian Sun.* She didn't even look pretty when she sank. Most ships do. Most of 'em make a fine final plunge. This baby disgracefully rolled on her side, turned turtle, crushed at least five lifeboats on that side which had not pulled away, all of them loaded with people, and then she just disappeared, and there was a spit of white water, high, for a moment, and nothing.

What impressed me most of all was the fact that I couldn't see that convoy any more. It had scattered, there wasn't a sign of it. It had scattered every which way into the dawn and was gone, still with naval protection.

Two destroyers were left behind. They were a mile away, dashing in and out between two other wounded ships which still floated, picking up survivors. Us they never picked up. We did everything but dance an Irish jig on that life raft, but would those destroyers look at us?

We drifted with the current, a heavy sea running. We were all pretty good sailors. You had to be. It was riding a roller coaster on the raft, up and down on the crests and into the troughs. Some seas, but no white horses breaking, so we were fairly safe. But it seemed like we were drifting fast, northeast. I guessed it was the gulf stream but it didn't feel any too warm. By the time the sun got up high, there wasn't anything to be seen, no convoy, no destroyers, no wreckage, only three men and a radio on a raft. That was us.

"Golly," Big Red said with a grin. He was dumb enough to be cheerful. "I'm sure glad I didn't bet you, Nucky. You'd have reamed me. Why that U-boat took us just like taking candy from a baby."

"Fun, wasn't it?" I said acidly.

"Nucky is sore again," Red said. "Play the radio, Long Boy."

"We don't play this radio," Lev said. "No use running down the batteries. We'll need these batteries."

"For gosh sake," said Big Red, "what'n hell will we need batteries for when we might cook out here till the war is over?"

"Just so we won't cook out here," said Lev. "I'm building a transmitter."

"A transmitter?" I said. "That's the last straw. You don't build a transmitter from a receiver! You need a crystal and stuff."

"That's right," said Leviticus Jones. "But what most folk don't know is there are such things as low power transmitters. Now in this receiver there are six tubes, two of which are 1Q5's."

"That's good?" Big Red asked.

"That's fine," said Lev. "1Q5 tubes are beam power tetrodes. All you have to do is put one hundred thirty volts on the plate and you've got a power input."

"I don't get it," I said.

"I can run a single watt input to a 1Q5," he said, "right from these two 67½-volt batteries here. I was bringing my old crystals over to England with me just on the chance that I might be able to build an amateur rig over there, maybe with permission, and use it. I've got my old eighty meter crystal right here. And those Sunderland and Catalina patrol planes do their transmitting on 80 meters. So I'm making a one-watt transmitter for eighty meters."

"But you ain't got an aerial!" said Big Red. "And you ain't got a microphone or nothing."

"You men will make the antenna," he said. "We'll use the loop in this receiver and stretch it out for a hundred thirty feet or so, winding it around the three of us while we are erect. We can try. I'll key this thing, no audio, no microphone. I'll key it without a key by using two wires and completing the cathode circuit to ground. I'll send Morse on 80 meters and try to get help."

"I don't know what the hell you're talking about," I said, "but one watt in a haywire antenna ain't going to do any good and if you had a grain of brains you'd know it."

Well, it was amazing. He didn't have any soldering iron, mind you, and he managed to use what he had in that receiver, making connections by twisting wire ends to the tube connections, without solder. It took him most of the day, but when he was finished, he gave it a try. He did not have a wireless key, he just touched two wires together, and that made some sort of circuit so that he was transmitting. "How do you know it works?" I said.

"Hold the antenna where there is a bare spot on the wire."

"I did," I said, "and it burned a white scar on my hand."

"That is rf," he said. "Radio frequency energy. That is the stuff we are going to radiate. So the rig works. That's enough. We'll save it for tonight."

"Why save it?" I said.

"Tonight, the skip gets longer and the signal will go further. More chance of more people hearing it, and some one coming to rescue us," Lev said. "You'd be surprised what a single watt will do, Nucky.

"I once worked for a station four hundred miles away a full half hour solid, with only a watt of input."

So we sat there all day. We didn't have anything to eat and we didn't have anything to drink. But it wasn't so bad. The sun wasn't hot, and the seas dropped off so that it was fairly safe to close your eyes without tipping the raft, and we floated. Big Red, who don't have any nerves, he just knocked off and slept most of the time. Long Boy was like a big kid with that one watter. He tinkered with it all day long, like a hick, polishing and finishing and making better connections. And me, I did the dirty work and looked for ships.

We didn't see any ships, but we saw a plan. It was a big two-motored job, a Catalina, I guess, but it didn't seem to see us; we could not stand and wave because the sea wasn't that calm, but I ripped off my shirt and waved it. No good though, he just kept on flying and never saw us. I began to get worried because it wasn't so good. No telling where we were. No telling how long it might be. Maybe never. Me, I hadn't considered dying out there. Not actually.

Then the night came down and we waited and waited. I guess it was around midnight when Lev finally started transmitting. It was damn tiresome work because we couldn't hear if anyone did come back to us. He hadn't built a receiving part for this eighty meters. He could just send and that was all. So he sent over and over, "SOS, survivors of *Persian Sun* adrift on raft approximate qth (that meant position he told us later) such and such and so many degrees." And brother, did we guess at the latitude and longitude.

Lev sent that message so much that night, I began to get a little of the code myself. You couldn't hear it, but you could see a little flicker in the tubes when he closed the circuit, and I got to recognize a couple of letters. Finally Lev said, "Batteries getting weak, fellas. I guess we'd better save some juice for tomorrow night."

"You can toss them," I said. "Nobody is hearing one watt out here!"

Big Red said, "If I thought we was near land anywhere, I'd swim it, me being such a good swimmer."

Then our luck broke. Toward dawn, we was drifting along and we saw the submarine. She was big and black and she was moving on top of the water very slowly like she had seen us. It was still kind of dark, but there was something left of the moon and you could see fairly well. Sure, she had seen us, by God, she was almost expecting to see us. She hove to, a couple of yards away. Then we saw a sailor with a submachine-gun in his hands and a knapsack of hand grenades on his shoulder. He was standing by the forward gun. Up in

the conning tower were the captain and an officer.

"Ahoy the raft," said the officer in English.

"I hear you talking," I yelled.

"Are you the raft with the radio transmitter?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, we are," I said. "How's about a lift outa this man's ocean? It's getting lonesome here."

"Pass the transmitter over to the submarine," said the officer. "Or I'll shoot you on the spot."

"You mean we got to give up the transmitter?" said Lev. "But they're Germans. We need this little rig. They ain't going to help us. You ask them Nucky."

"Are you going to pick us up?" I said.

"Nein," said the master of the U-boat. "We cannot do that. You are English?"

"American. How about some food?"

"Nein," he snapped. "Next time you keep off an English boat and keep your feet dry. Pass over the transmitter."

Lev said, "They're afraid we might transmit their position or something." He stared at the boat. "Here it is, Nucky."

I took the transmitter and tossed it overboard. It sank with a splash. I yelled, "That good enough for you?"

"Ja," said the captain." Good enough. We will radio your position to the English."

"If you get around to it," I said bitterly under my breath, having read enough newspapers to know when these guys were having a wonderful time at somebody else's expense.

"We could take that boat," Lev said quietly. He had a pistol in his hand. He had got it out of the portfolio. "We could do it," he said. "If I plugged that fella with the machine-gun—"

"My God!" I said, terrified. "Don't! Use your head, kid! *Think!* They'd blast us to bits! All they'd have to do—"

"I could swim to that boat in five seconds," said Big Red licking his lips. "I could get those grenades and that machine-gun."

"Heck," I said, desperate, "do you have to be dumb to be brave? Cut it out, you stoops! Cut it out, you green-eared hicks, do you hear me? Give me that gun!"

"I can take her," Lev said sharply. "And I ain't a hick."

The guy by the forward gun had seen the pistol. He bellowed something in German and raised the machine-gun. He spit at us. Lev fired. It was out of my hands. Lev hit him cold, and the sailor went down. Big Red splashed into the sea and stroked to the sub. Lev fired again, and then again. Then he stood up and yelled, "Drop 'em down the hatch, Red!"

Big Red was clinging up on the sub. He picked up the grenade sack and the machine-gun and he ran for the conning tower. When he reached the top of it, another man was just coming up. Lev fired again.

Meanwhile I was frantically paddling to the sub and by the time we climbed aboard, Red had dropped a hand grenade down through the conning tower into the boat.

There was a sharp explosion, and the smoke of it shot skyward out of the conning tower. Big Red had ducked aside of course. Then Lev and me were on the ship. "Get that machine-gun from Red," said Long Boy. "I think they have other hatches fore and aft. You take aft. Anyone comes up, shoot him. We've got to keep them below deck." I'll take this side with the pistol."

"Listen," I said, "they'll submerge, they'll dive, and where will we be?"

"Why, Nucky," he said, "don't be dumb. They can't dive. The control room is under the conning tower. Red is dropping grenades into the control room, there can't no one go in there to work the controls. There ain't no one can get in there to climb up and close the two conning-tower hatches, not while Red is dropping grenades, don't you see? They can't dive while we keep that tower open. So mind your hatches!"

By God, the boy was right. Big Red sat up there in the tower, as day broke, keeping clear of the hole. Every time he heard the slightest sound below, he would pull a pin and drop a grenade right down into the control room. "Golly," Red called, "you plugged these three heinies between the eyes, Lev."

Matter of fact, he had got the sailor between the eyes too.

Day broke, and there we were. Three guys on a sub. Three men on a seahorse. Red on the conning tower, me on the aft hatch, Lev on the fore hatch. They tried to come up my way once, and I gave them a hot burst. They didn't try again. I kept wondering if they would try to shoot a guy with a gun out of one of the torpedo tubes, but they didn't. That's all there was to it. We kept them below and we kept them out of the control room and we kept the conning tower hatches wide open. So they couldn't submerge.

It sounds silly and simple. I guess that's what it was, silly and simple. But after all, there had been just three of them out on top of her and the fourth who came up. And that was how Lev had done it, four quick shots. No one with time or thought in that rapidity to close hatches and crash or dive.

After that, we had the tiger by the tail. Sure, they couldn't submerge, not as long as Big Red's grenades held out. He had eight or nine of them. But we couldn't do much either, except stand there, on guard, and hold the tiger's tail. It was stalemate.

Big Red sat up there, staring down into the depths of the submarine from his perch. Once some one poked a gun around from the control room below and fired six shots straight up through the conning tower, hoping to get Red with one of them. Red saw the heater before the slugs started whistling and ducked back. Then he pulled a pin and dropped a potato masher down. Nobody fired any more after that.

Finally, a flying boat, a Catalina, spotted us. That wasn't until noontime. It came in from the east and saw us, because the sub was making quite a wash where the seas hit her, with her just lolling there, and this big ship did a power dive on us that nearly drove my Adam's apple into my heels. We waved a white shirt, meaning surrender, because that baby looked mean with her bristling guns. She had bombs.

She hung over us all day long until five, and then another Catalina came over and relieved her, and finally at dusk, a four-stacker showed on the horizon, one of those American jobs they traded to Winston, and that was that.

"You know," Big Red said to me when we were safely aboard the H.M.S. *Broadway,* bound for Reykjavik, Iceland, "I just figured Nucky that I ain't been neutral, me dropping them grenades on them Nazi ratzis."

"You're a dope," I said. I was mad. "Where did you get that ratzi?"

"From Winchell."

"You're a dope," I said. "A big dope."

Leviticus Jones was lying on the bunk opposite, sipping the coffee he had poured into his saucer. "And me, Nucky? I guess I'm a dope too?"

I began to get sore at them. "Yeah!" I barked. "You're the biggest dope Arkansas ever turned out! If you got to be as dumb as you guys to be brave, let me be a coward. It was luck, all luck. You didn't have enough brains to be scared."

Big Red said, "I was scared stiff. I wouldn't tell my own mother this, but I was."

"You were?" I said faintly.

"Well," said Long Boy, "I guess I was scareder than you Red. I was scared."

I stopped being sore.

"Well," I said. "I was scared, too. But I didn't know you were. Well." I coughed and then sipped my coffee. That was different. I wasn't sore at them any more. They'd been scared. But they'd done it anyhow. That made everything different. That made everything all right.

MEXICO LAUGH

By BARRY SCOBEE

Author of "Dangling Gun," etc.

South of the Border, They Wrote Their Laws in Letters of Lead

STAY in Mexico awhile and you meet some pretty cold-jawed Americans. One of the type was in the ranch yard when the dusty "army" of twenty or so men jingled up on their sweaty horses, in the biting August noontime sun.

Name of Shannon. I'd drunk beer with him a couple of times in Musquiz. And seen him again at a cattle sale sixty miles south. He took in my empty holster with a tight little grin.

"In a jackpot, Gordon?" he asked, tipping his head at the crowd jamming around a water trough.

"And holding less than a pair of deuces," I said.

I shoved my horse into the jam, and as he drank I bent and gulped up a gallon-size drink myself. And made up my mind about something while I did it. I didn't know Shannon worth shucks. Our talks over warm beer hadn't been skin deep. But I had to yip to somebody to toss me a line.

I decided to trust him.

"Got a minute?" I asked him when I pulled out of the shoving horses, and I jerked my head toward an empty shed.

Shannon stalked after me casually. I tied my mount in the shade under the shed. Shannon didn't come in. He meandered around to the rear. I liked that. Better than busting right up to me for everybody to see. I kneed a loose board looser, in the shed's back wall, and squatted through the opening. Shannon was there, waiting.

"You riding north?" I asked. "To the Rio Grande, maybe into Texas?"

"Might be," he said, tight-mouthed.

"Listen," I plunged. "I've sold out my little two-by-four ranch, lock, stock, and title, to that big Dos Toros American outfit."

"Tired of Mexico?" he asked quizzically.

"I like Mexico," I said. "But six years have got me fed up with living alone in a three-by-six shack on the desert and doing my own hash slinging."

"You need a wife, or maybe a pardner."

"Haven't been able to rate either one," I said shortly. "See here, Shannon, the Dos Toros paid me six thousand gold for my outfit, cash."

"Whew! Don't tell me you let this newest Savior-of-Mexico grab it."

"They rode in on the little goat herder's shack at daylight this morning, where I spent the night," I said. "I had no chance to sidestep 'em. One of the Big Boy's recruits had seen me receive the money yesterday. Why they didn't pluck me right then and there I don't savvy. Unless His Nibs was afraid it would start a riot that he couldn't handle. Or he wants to snatch it all for himself. Or he doesn't know how hot the Mexican Rurales are on his heels—I understand they are combing the desert for him. Or he wants to wait till he joins the rest of his so-called army at Mentado's settlement on the Rio Grande, so they can see just how much is grabbed and be in on the divvy. Or one more or, and it's the most likely, he's playing the old Tabby-and-mouse game with me—you know how some Mexicans like that, like to string a guy along, then spring the trap, give the boys a big laugh, and give himself a build-up for smartness."

Shannon nodded, looking at me steadily with his gray eyes.

I SLID my hand inside my shirt and drew out a brown envelope, that was sweaty and moulded to the curve of my belly.

"Here's sixty one-hundred dollar shinplasters, Uncle Sam jobs," I said. "All I've got as a souvenir for six years here except my horse and saddle, and the gun they took off me. If I try to make a break with it—well, they're watching me like a village constable watches a bum, and they've got shooting guns with bullets that can outrun my hoss, good as he is. Shannon, are you likely to be passing Bill Newman's ranch, over on the Texas side of the Rio?"

"Might."

"Then," I said, "if this stuff won't get you into too much of a jam take it along. I'll meet you there or pick it up later."

I held it out and he accepted it, in slow motion, with his sun-baked hand that had a little mist of sweat on the back, his steady eyes driving at me like horses.

For a half minute we stood there, our eyes fighting a nameless war. And I couldn't tell what was going on behind his gray see-ers. All I could see was a face made of brown leather, a poker mouth, and a ruthless chin.

"Good luck," I said, foolishly, and crawled back through the hole.

SHANNON shoved the loose board tight behind me. Through my horse's legs I could see some of the Mexicans, including the Big Boy, looking my way. But it was shadowy under the shed, to men out in the bright sun, and I straightened carefully up and stepped out into plain sight, then went striding toward the gang.

The army was pulling strips of jerky beef off a clothesline where it had been hung to cure. Men were gnawing leaves of it like hungry dogs. And the "general" was watching me.

He called himself El Leon del Norte—Lion of the North. Where he had sprung up from nobody seemed to know, in the garbled rumors I had heard. He was a huge carcass of a man in a huge saddle on a huge black stallion. A yokel, a clown, a waddling human bear if there ever was one.

With a windy force about him to lead, to drive men; and a recklessness, or ruthlessness, in him, a disregard for horseflesh and human life that was rooted in bull ignorance—I had figured out all that about him during the forenoon of riding.

He beckoned to me, watching suspiciously, and when I approached:

"Fork over," he said in Mexican.

"Fork what over?" I bit back.

His clown face hardened and he wheeled the shaggy, vicious stallion at me.

"That money, gringo!"

I slapped the horse away. Men began to turn in our direction. Shannon, forty feet from me, cracked his hard fist to a jaw. The man thudded to his sitter in the dust.

Shannon hit another one, sent him staggering, and bawled at me in the lingo:

"Run, Gordon, run!"

That sent the gang at me like dogs into a fight. The clumsy bear dropped down from his saddle, not so clumsy, and came waddling at me. Just for luck I cracked my knuckles into his kisser. Then the mob was brawling all over me. I hit a couple more. But they had my arms, my legs. The boss-man's vast paw twisted into my shirt, jerked it out of my pants, half tore it off.

From the tail of my eye I saw Shannon, a hundred feet away now, a grin on his rocky face. A thought whipped through me: He'd started this, at least helped it along. Now he was crawling out. Well, it might be worth six thousand bucks to him!

"Where is it?" El Leon del Norte roared as his exploring hand failed to touch the envelope inside my shirt.

They clawed at me, manhandled me, pushed me to the dust and dragged me, in yanking off my boots. The pack was brawling and gabbling. When they realized that the money wasn't on me, nor in my foot leather, they forgot me and everything else and went galloping to the shed, chattering that I had hid it about my saddle.

They shucked my horse and went over the saddle like ants, shook out the blanket; and then they turned to the shed itself. They clawed through loose hay-trash, felt the dusty overhead studding, peeped through the back-side cracks, flocked around to the rear, and finally bunched up studying me. At last El Leon del Norte thought of the King Solomon way to make me spill where the cash was hidden. His great greasy shirt belly quivered with grim mirth as he made his triumphant brag.

"A little fire and the gringo won't be so cool," he said.

He scraped a match on a post, like ripping cloth, and with the same gesture tossed it into that dry litter. The trash wasn't as volatile as gasoline but it did its best, which was good. In thirty ticks the inside of that shed was boiling with flame.

Seeing I didn't rush in to save the money his nibs was puzzled. He stood there on his thick, spraddled legs watching me. His big thick face began to smoulder. He lifted out one of his six-guns and half raised it at me, uncertain. Then the fire burst through the thatched roof with a soft puffy explosion and black smoke. It scared the horses, there around the trough. They began to sidle and trot away. One or two men let out warning yips. The crowd broke up, to catch their mounts. El Leon waddled for the big stallion, that was nipping at some of the saddled animals to drive them out of danger. And I went after my reins-dragging bay.

As I forked my mount I saw the owner of the ranch, a square-shooting likable Mexican named Bustamente, and his wife and three kids standing by their house uneasily taking in the scene. The shed was not near other buildings, and good luck for Bustamente, the light breeze was blowing the embers away harmlessly.

In the middle of the horse catching an hombre squawked at the leader that I must have given the money to the other gringo. At that, eyes went around searching for Shannon. In a minute somebody saw him. He was sitting on his horse two hundred yards to the north. When he saw that he was observed he waved his hat at the crowd, and thumbed his nose. Then he went racing for a nearby willow bosque.

A RIFLE shot cracked. Dust kicked up near Shannon. Two more shots jarred the hot noontime. But before the gang could really get into action Shannon disappeared into the bosque.

Disgust and anger surged through me—the damn fool, why had he waited to attract attention to himself? He could have been three or four miles away, a good start on the thirty-five miles or so to the Rio Grande.

Two men held the shaggy, rearing stal-

lion while the shirttail general got aboard. From a waddling dunce he turned to a Big Guy on Horseback by the simple change of being in a saddle. He ordered two men to look after me. He ordered three others to bring eight head of Bustamente's horses in a nearby corral. Then he waved an arm like a dashing general and the cavalcade was rough riding it after Shannon.

My two guards steered me to one side of the willow patch. They wore big sombreros with chin-straps dangling under their jaws. They were tough gents.

Pretty soon Shannon topped out of a gully to higher ground, beyond the bosque. A pair of shots popped in the willows, but Shannon was a mile ahead and too far to waste ammunition on.

When the Lion of the North and his men pushed out of the brush they spread out in a line of skirmishers. My guards and I fell into the line. We rode at a run. So did Shannon.

He gained. He had a top horse under him. And for all of his size the Big Boy's black stallion was slow.

A race couldn't last long, not in that desert heat. Gradually the drive petered out. Shannon slowed in keeping with us. The pursuit became a jog trot, with Shannon holding his two-mile lead.

My mind kept hammering at the puzzle of the cold-jawed man. Why had he purposely led the bandit-army to chase him? Had he hid the money back at the ranch?

It seemed to me that typically American nose-thumbling had been meant for me. The longer I rode and the hotter I got the more was I certain that somehow Shannon was giving me the laugh.

The hard hot sun pushed down on my shoulders like a boring fist. I had no canteen—one of the riders had taken mine in the forenoon. There was only four canteens in the whole gang. They hadn't had much opportunity yet to steal equipment. About mid-afternoon the riders veered together and the canteens were passed around. When a man reached one toward me El Leon's big paw swiped it aside.

"A dead man don't need water," he sputtered.

"Yeah?" I managed to drawl. "How come, hombre?"

"We don't get that twenty-thirty thousand pesos," he rumbled from his belly up, "we will hang you against a wall with bullets."

"That would give you a nice build-up, wouldn't it?" I jeered. "Make you famous. Help you gather recruits."

By the startled, gusty look that jerked across his face I knew I had said the wrong thing. He fairly gulped the idea.

When we got scattered out again, with my guards gone sleepy and no longer watchful, a rider eased alongside of my bay and held out a canteen. I was glad enough to down the hot trickle that was left.

"Why'd you do that?" I asked.

"I'm not mad at you, Senor Gordon."

"You know my name?" I said, surprised. "But you're riding with that big devil there—aren't you a big bad wolf?"

He laughed apologetically. "El Leon del Norte, he ride past my house and say, 'Come with me.' I have no gun, I have only horse. I must go with him. But me, I do not like it. He shot a man last night for nothing. Some of us are afraid."

Jog, jog, jog. Dust swirls, desert growths of thorny things, cactus, the spidery ocotillo the lances of the Spanish dagger. The sun so hard on my back that it seemed I could take hold of the heat and twist it aside—even as used to it as I was.

And Shannon, there ahead, never more than three or four kilometers, never getting out of our sight across the level or rolling desert.

He'll veer off and miss Mentado's settlement and cross into Texas with my money, I kept trying to reassure myself. He knows there are more bandits at Mentado's. I told him, there in our brief talk behind the shed. He'll steer to the right or

left and miss them. But all the time I knew damned well, down inside of myself, like a man does once in a few years, that he wasn't going to. I didn't know the answer but I wished I had played the game better and tried, there at the Bustamente ranch, to make a break myself. Damn the cold-jawed fraternity!

ALONG toward sundown, with our jogging shadows reaching to grotesque lengths, the greenery on the Rio Grande stalked into sight. Then the squat adobe structures that were Mentado's settlement. And Shannon kept riding straight for it.

There was still level sunshine when a handful of men came riding out from the place. We picked up our pace. When Shannon was within a quarter of a mile of the other riders he stopped. Waited. Both gangs got to him at about the same time. There was a lot of gabble, of explaining to a hard-nosed lieutenant with a blue-clay complexion. I had seen one Egyptian in my time. This Mexican had the clean-cut bony face that that fellow had. When the brief chatter was finished the Lion of the North faced Shannon.

"Where is the money, American?"

Shannon grinned, just a tight little taunting grin. They ganged him, tilted him off his horse. Shannon didn't put up any fight now. They practically stripped him, and did strip his horse. But there was no magic—the money-bunny failed to materialize from his person or the saddle-gear.

"Where is it?" roared the Lion of the North.

Shannon's scratching little grin again. Enough to make a man's fist itch. All the hot ride and thirst and disappointment whirled up in the greasy general. He yanked out his gun and threw down on Shannon. I thought he meant it. He did. I spur-jigged my horse, made him jump against the hip of the black stallion. That big and shaggy brute must have thought another stud was trying to take over. He went wild. The Lion dropped his six-gun and held to leather with both fists. By the time they got the stud's feet on the ground again El Leon had another gun in his big glommer, and he began to hack the air with it, jabbing at me, at Shannon, and squalling that one of us was going to croak where the money was or go to hell on hot lead.

"Better not," warned the blue-clad lieutenant. "You might kill the wrong one, my general, and we need that money. Save 'em," he added, "for breakfast. We'll know by then."

"Better, maybe," the big one conceded grudgingly. "Saddle up, you!" he said to Shannon.

"I didn't take the saddle off," said Shannon, and sat down on the ground.

Some of the men hid grins. The lieutenant, whose name appeared to be Garcia, saw it. He yanked one of the grinners out of his saddle, gave him the boot, and told him to saddle Shannon's horse.

When we rode on this hard-nosed Garcia kept Shannon and me apart, so that I had no chance to ask him what the heck he had done with my cash.

THE bandit army was using Mentado's big corral for a camp ground. There were about forty men, in their ordinary clothing, some glum, some larking, some on the strut and swagger. They had fifty or sixty stolen, unridden horses. They'd got hold of a big wagon and had it backed up to the rear door of Mentado's store and were loading it with canned goods, flour, bacon and such like. Some of the men had new shirts and pants and hats, and bolts of dress goods to take to their women. The store's stock of saddles, guns and ammunition was piled on the ground with a guard over it.

Ricardo Mentado, well dressed and about forty years old, was looking on sadly. When he saw me, and that I was a prisoner, he hurried over, shook hands, and said, "Tchz-tchz" with his tongue. But

made no bellyache about what they were doing to him, though I knew it practically meant ruin. A white guy, Mentado; I'd known him for five years.

Lieutenant Garcia, as industrious as a see-all top sergeant, poked me into an iron-barred cell room built against the twelve-foot high adobe wall and padlocked the door, and thumbed Shannon into a similar lockup next door. A foot-thick adobe wall separated us, without any wicket between. But, standing at my door, I heard Shannon at his.

"Hi, guy!" he said, and chuckled.

My impulse was to slam back at him, what he'd done with my money, but I couldn't in the face of his joshing, or toughness, or what-you-may-call-it. He was like that—one of those reassuring birds that you don't like to make yourself a butt before, don't like to show your weaknesses. So I said:

"Look to the west, fella." A mass of black clouds was banked far up-river. "If those things give down it's going to be tough swimming the silvery Rio Grande of song and story, when we bust out of here."

"Attaboy!" he said, for no reason.

Ground fires were glowing in the dusk. Men were barbecuing goat meat over the embers—and gobbling hunks of store cheese and canned peaches like turkeys, and swilling coffee with handsful of sugar in it. The Lion of the North stalked about on the big weary stallion, looking sappy-wise.

"You know why he stays on that hoss?" Shannon must have spoken behind his hand, because the guarded tones came to me clearly. "Because on the hoof he'd be nothing but a railroad bum, and he knows it."

"Yeah, the Man on Horseback, up there in the saddle," I said.

"Right. Garcia is the money maker in this crowd, the opportunist, the good old brains. He's using the big boy for his front."

"Tough on Mentado," I said.

"And a lot of other good Mexican people," Shannon came back grimly.

Garcia, with that thin nose of his as straight as a ruler edge, heard us then. He posted a guard with an army rifle and bayonet—apparently the only weapon of the kind in the whole crowd—before the two cells with orders to punch us if we tried any more talking.

With a slit-eyed look at us and around the corral he proceeded to post a man with a pistol at the back door of Mentado's store, there by the wagon; and also two men with rifles at the wide gate. This covered the exits, because the corral's adobe walls were twelve or fourteen feet high—and no ladders in sight.

BY THE time the army, including His Nibs, had stuffed itself, black night was thick over the world. Sheet lightning was winking and flirting in the great cloud segment up-river. The Lion-bum and Garcia and two or three others went into a fireside huddle, discussing us, judging by their glances toward the cells. Then Garcia crimped over on his wiry legs and unlocked the doors.

He put Shannon at one fire and me at another and told us to eat. We did. It was good barbecue, if you like goat. When I tossed down my last bone Garcia squatted in front of me.

"Where's that money?" he asked me, in good-enough English.

"It went up in smoke at the shed," I said.

"You lie, gringo! Tell me where eet is, een English, and I split weeth you, feefty-feefty."

"You're a liar too, Mex," I said.

He straightened up. I thought he was going to kick me in the chin, where I squatted. But he only studied my grin for a minute, then thumped across to Shannon.

"Where's that six thousand in gold?" I heard him ask, still in English.

"Speak Mexican!" Shannon yelled at him, in Mexican so all would understand. "What are you trying to do, double-cross your pals?"

Murder surged into the blue-clay face. I got up and moved toward them. Other men moved in. Everything went still, even the shifting horse-bunch. Garcia's open palm shot out for a slap, as swift as a twinkle of that lightning in the west. But Shannon was a shade quicker. His head jerked back and his hand went up, and he had a grip on Garcia's fingers. He twisted, and Garcia went full length to the dust, like a tossed-down rope.

"That will be enough from you for one evening, Sergeant," Shannon said.

Garcia was up like a thrown dog, "Sergeant!" he ripped, and his gun came out like a striking snake. "You—"

But it wasn't time yet for shooting. Or the curious crowd was there. At any rate the man had control. He releathered the gun, and stepped back, as if in deference to the Big Boy up on the weary stallion again—Lord, hadn't the big slug any mercy for horseflesh!

Men were ringing us around, and still. The Lion nudged his horse in nearer, turned him broadside to us.

"This is something, buddy," said Shannon to me. "What they were rigging up a while ago."

I didn't need the warning. I could whiff it in the silence.

El Leon del Norte lifted a six-gun from his belt. He took it by the barrel and held the butt down to us. What the hell! My thoughts twinkled like that far-off lightning. And I thought I savvied. The one of us who knew where the six thousand was would grab that gun, in desperation, and try to shoot his way out! A typical Mexican trick. Good psychology. Good for a Mexican laugh all up and down the Rio Grande, if it worked.

And I was afraid it would work. I was scared weak all in a second that Shannon would grab and go to shooting. And get his. And I didn't want him to. For I knew that gun wouldn't be loaded.

I snatched it myself, yanked it out of the big, dirty fist. I knew instantly that I was right. It wasn't heavy enough. I pointed it at the ground and worked the trigger. Six little pops resulted, about as loud as striking a match with your thumbnail. No powder nor bullets in the cartridges. I slung the gun at the Lion. It thwacked him in the chest so hard he grunted.

Nothing happened, except more silence. With sweaty men around me, the smell of wood smoke drifting across my nostrils, the sniff of night and thin dust, I tried to savvy what was coming. But all I could get was a sense of disappointment in the leaders. Then Shannon put it in words.

"They expected—wanted you, or me, to point the gun at His Nibs when we pulled the trigger."

"But he have attacked the general anyhow," Garcia said quickly, and testily, in English. Then he was jabbering to the crowd in Mexican: "This gringo has made an attempt on the life of our general! He has tried to kill our great chieftain. What is the penalty of brave Mexican patriots?"

"The wall!" some of the men shouted. "A firing squad."

Garcia looked up at the Lion. His stare was part command, part cue, and sham deference to the general. And the big lug, no doubt thinking of the build-up it would give him, spoke the sentence in a chesty rumble.

"The wall! At sunup!"

THE horses kept up a continual noise through the night, milling, kicking, squealing. Goat bones and gristle burned and smoked and stunk in the fire embers.

I got up three or four times and looked out my cell door. Busybody Garcia had taken off the guard with the belly-sticker steel. The cloud bank up west had wrung the water out of itself and quit.

It was still dark enough, when the camp began to crawl out of night into a new day, for the breakfast fires to be bright and merry. A smell of fresh rain, from far off, was in the air. Experimentally I used my hand for a soundboard and said to the other cell door, six feet away:

"Hi, in there?"

"Hi yourself," Shannon came back cheerfully, too cheerfully, considering that I was to be shot. "You made a bust last night."

"Decidedly," I said. "Which one do you refer to?"

He chuckled. "Grabbing that gun out of His Nib's fist. I figure they figured the guy who had the six thousand would grab the iron and try to shoot his way out. But you were too quick. You were afraid I'd grab it. You had that look about you. Your glance at me, you know. They got it. The primitive mind is good that way—what you call, simple, ur, psychic."

"All same way the dog can find his way home from a thousand miles," I said.

"Exactly. So now they're going to lean you against the adobe and squeeze me for the cash."

SOMEHOW, maybe it was in his tone, he left the door open for me to ask about the money. But I wouldn't do it. I wouldn't show uneasiness, or weakness. Not to that cold-jaw.

"You snatched that gun to save my hide," Shannon said, after a time. "You thought I didn't know it was empty. Tut-tut, kid."

Garcia came up and unlocked our doors. "Hi, Sergeant," Shannon greeted. The thin nostrils dilated, the thin mouth grinned but said nothing.

Outside, Shannon and I made a swift survey. A guard still stood at Mentado's back door, and two at the wide gate. Shannon stretched mightily, lifting himself up on his toes. "On your toes, fella, on your toes, it's good for the muscles," he said to me. I knew it was a warning. He picked up a stout little stick and pretended to try to break it, exercising.

I saw my bay horse in the herd, and whistled. He trotted to me with a glad winny. My gear was on the ground. I proceeded to saddle up. Some of the men around grinned at that, figuring it was lost labor. Some didn't grin. Shannon sat on the tongue of the big wagon and watched me.

El Leon del Norte was stalking about on the black stallion. Sergeant Garcia was giving orders here and there. I went to the horse trough and washed. Shannon followed suit. Garcia hovered around so that we couldn't talk secrets. The morning was turning silver. Garcia thumbed me to a fire.

"The general says for you to eat," he directed, humorous all at once. "He says you can have anything you want, for your last meal this side of hell." Blue-clay was talking in Mex and plenty loud for the boys to hear. "Anything in the world you want—the rib, the leg, the tongue, the backbone, of the goat."

Snickers went around. Mexican humor.

I filled an empty peach can with scalding coffee. Shannon did likewise, at an adjoining fire that Garcia indicated. We talked across space, with Garcia staying close enough to hear.

"If you'd missed this town yesterday, when you rode north," I said, "you would be safe in Texas now."

"Shucks, I don't want to leave México," he retorted. "I like it, like the people. I've got me a sweet little layout, 'way down south of here. Some cattle and hectares of land. I was heading for Texas to find me a pardner or raise five thousand bucks on my unadulterated note to develop water and buy some more cattle. If I can do that

my place will be home, sweet home for the rest of my life."

It was in my mind to say he already had the money but I wouldn't do it. I wouldn't humor him—or be sour grapes. And I told me that by my silence I was making myself into the kind of sucker that always gets hooked by too much modesty.

AT GARCIA'S orders men began to hitch six flighty little Spanish mules to the wagon. At the same time Garcia picked out men with rifles, and by his venomous glances at me I knew he was picking a firing squad. Ricardo Mentado, the ruined storekeeper, patted my shoulder, too emotional to speak. The Lion got down from his saddle to gulp another can of coffee.

And about then things began to happen.

A man was at the head of each mule holding him on the ground while the driver climbed to the seat and gathered the jerk-line. Ready, he bawled: "Give 'em their heads!" As one animal, the mules jumped into their collars. But the wagon did not move. Instead, the doubletrees broke loose from the tongue, and the driver was jerked headlong from the seat.

I saw instantly what had happened, because I saw fresh-broken wood. When Shannon was sitting on the wagon-tongue he had removed the iron pin and substituted the wooden stick he had been playing with.

That corral became a madhouse. The harnessed mules, jerking the doubletrees and the tangled driver after them, plunged into the mass of horses, some saddled, most of them loose. Dust, already thick, fogged thicker. Men shouted. A loose horse bowled the Lion into a sprawl. And over it all I heard Shannon yelling:

"Ride 'em cowboy!"

I vaulted to my saddle faster than I'd ever done in my life before. I saw Shannon fighting to mount the stallion. He was nearly up when the Lion grabbed his leg. They tussled. I jumped my bay into the howling general and knocked him spinning. Then Shannon was aboard.

The two guards at the gate were shooting, to keep the horse-herd from stampeding over them. I dove my bay into the herd, bawling at the top of my lungs and slapping my hat. Shannon was doing the same thing. Two minds clicking as one!

Then the herd was pouring through the gate. Shannon and I went out in the middle of the squeezing, squawling animals. My last glance back showed men sprawled all over the corral, or swinging on to their terrified mounts.

The corral gate faced the river. The old Rio was about three hundred yards away, Shannon and I headed for it, with half the horse-herd ahead of us.

Over the pound of hoofs my ears caught a roaring that had been dimly in the back of my head for some time. Then I saw what was making it—the river was down in a muddy, rolling, undulating flood a hundred yards wide.

Shannon kept going. Shots were starting up behind us. I saw a loose horse stumble and go down. The herd, approaching that wild water, split, some upstream, some down, except for three or four frightened beasts that plunged in.

Shannon's mind must have been made up. The big stallion tried to veer along the bank. But the cold-jawed man yanked at the reins and hammered with his spurs, and the black, mastered, took the water with a great leap.

Only one thing for me to do, and I did it—made my bay take the plunge too.

We were tumbled and swept down-current. But the horses quickly caught their swimming stride. We held them at an angle, cutting for the distant-seeming Texas shore. I couldn't see much of Shannon except his head and shoulders and his light-colored big hat.

I saw a lot of men on horses plunging down to the shore, turning off to keep abreast of us. And they were shooting. I

couldn't hear the shots, but I could see the motions.

UNDULATING sickeningly with the great brown greasy waves, struggling to keep on the surface, I chanced to look toward Shannon just as the big black quit his pawing strokes and seemed to wilt. Shannon rolled from the saddle, but hung on. The stallion rolled to the surface like a stump of wood.

"He's been shot!" I bawled, and knew that Shannon couldn't hear me.

Shannon went under. I tried to steer my horse toward the spot. Then Shannon was up, clawing to his knees on to the horse's side. He straightened to his feet. The water was bagging his shirt at the waist. Suddenly it burst and splattered. I knew a bullet had hit it. Shannon whipped a gun from his leather—a big white-handled pistol, and I knew he must have plucked it off the Lion when they were tussling there in the corral.

I looked back. The Lion of the North was coming near the river on a bareback mule in great lunging strides. And he was firing a six-gun.

Shannon stood spraddle-legged on that teetering, rolling raft of a horse and blasted shot after shot. That picture was big time stuff—his balancing, the jerk of the gun in his fist, the cold-jawed look of him. Glory stuff. I wished I was up there doing what he was doing.

In a ragged half glance I saw that mule stumble and go down in a headlong slide, and El Leon del Norte with it. Hit by one of Shannon's slugs.

Somehow I got hold of the black stallion's bridle rein and tried to tow him. And I yelled at Shannon:

"Get down! Grab my horse's tail!"

But he thumbed his nose at that gang back there. Then we were close enough to Texas soil to begin hoping. A minute later that black stallion began to struggle. My horse's feet struck bottom. He got footing under him. The black must have felt ground too. He bulged up all at once, on his feet, and went breasting and leaping to dry land, with Shannon hanging one-arm to the saddle-horn.

The stallion snorted and sneezed and blew out water in a spray. He shook himself like a dog, and a spot of blood spattered on my wet hand. It had come from between the black's ears. I could see a small red gash there—the animal had been creased by a bullet.

Shannon stepped to the big saddle and signed for me to follow. Our panting horses went slogging up-shore in the sand. In a jiff we were in deep willows, out of sight from the south shore.

Opposite where we had entered the river Shannon pulled up. He grinned and began to pull an old rag, then a water-soaked box of ammunition, out of a saddle-pocket. He mashed the wet carton in his hand and swiftly poked fresh shells into the white-handled six-gun.

"Cartridges don't get soaked quick," he shouted above the river's roar.

His hand dived into the pocket again, and came out with—my sheaf of U. S. greenbacks.

"You asked me to bring this to Texas for you," he shouted, and shoved the wet paper into my hands.

"You put it in that pocket when His Nibs was burning the shed!" I bawled.

He grinned. He put out his hand, gave me a goodbye-grip that made me almost wince. Then he was driving that big stud back into the river.

THE old Rio Grande wasn't any lower. It looked worse. But what had been done once could be done again. I stuffed the wet bills into my shirt and spurred my bay into the ugly, sliding, foaming current that was undulating like a flying bird.

The Mexicans were watching us, three hundred yards down on the other side. And not shooting.

When I could I glanced at them. Once I saw Garcia shaking his fist in the Lion's

teeth. El Leon just sat flat on the ground by a dead—I reckoned—mule, bracing himself with his arms. I knew the signs. Sulking. And trying to think what to do next. The dunce mind. All the time Shannon was holding his gun out of the wet.

Then I saw Garcia kick the big hulk in the ribs.

A minute later the black stallion and my bay walked up out of the water, panting, streams running down from their sides.

Most of the Mexicans were grinning, at the figure of Shannon on the general's horse. Grinning at the big guy's sullen mortification. At Garcia's crazy fury, hopping around like a rooster, shrilling at his unseated general. I got some of his words.

"—let that gringo take your horse—you goat—jackass—spoiled our play—"

Then he turned on Shannon, screaming so you couldn't tell what he said. He hauled out his gun. But Shannon beat him to the shot. Garcia's gun jumped loose and plunged half out of sight in the loose sand.

Shannon looked that crowd over, then he hollered at them.

"Grab these two fakes and stuff them in Mentado's jail for the Rurales."

A half dozen men began to fade off the scene. Garcia's dependables. But the others, men who had been wheedled or kidnaped into the "army," ranch hands with no stomach for making themselves outlaws, were glad enough to grab the men who had given them some uneasy days. They knew anyhow, with primitive instinct, that the Lion was done for. The laugh was on him somehow, on him for obscure reasons that the Anglo-Saxon mind could probably never fully grasp.

Shannon followed that Roman holiday crowd back toward the open gate of Mentado's corral. I trooped up alongside the big black.

"You came back across," I said, "just to help out this crowd, and Mentado, by putting the kayo on these two hombres and their revolution."

"These Mex boys don't like a slobby fake any more than anybody else does," Shannon evaded. "Where you heading for, fella?"

I hauled that slab of tough wet greenbacks out of my shirt.

"You said something about a loan, Shannon," I said. "Or a pardner—"

He gave me that tight little grin of his, and it wasn't cold-jawed now.

"Pardner preferred," he said.

Charleston Charley had been known as the slickest confidence man in the East. His greatest opponent had been the very British inspector of the Shanghai police. Now they both join forces with a notorious Chinese thug when war levels all barriers. . . .

SHANGHAI DEATHKNELL

In the next SHORT STORIES
— April 10th —

By ALFRED BATSON

THE CAT WITHOUT WHISKERS

By WALTER C. BROWN

Author of "Black Joss," etc.

And What Is a Cat But a House Tiger . . . ?

SERGEANT DENNIS O'HARA of the Chinatown Squad stands six-feet-two, with deep blue eyes, a shock of thick red hair, and fists as big and square as his shoulders. And the slant-eyed men of the Yellow Quarter are quite convinced that "Sah-jin" O'Hara is *choy*—meaning born to luck.

Cold steel and hot lead and even the deadly noose called the "Shanghai Necklace" have all been unleashed against him in vain. So there are certain Sons of Han who make the finger-curse at sight of him, and spit twice over their left shoulders, calling him *I-kwei,* which means "Number One Devil Demon."

But since the strange affair of Sang Poh the cunning clerk and the Cat without Whiskers, O'Hara has won for himself a name even more feared—"Gimlet-Eye"—a phrase of dread to all who scheme against the Rice Face Law.

Aya, the yellow men say, never was a deed of murder more cunningly conceived and more perfectly executed, and yet the Blue Coat Sah-jin needed but a single

glance with the Gimlet-Eye to read Sang Poh's guilty secret as plainly as black writing upon rice paper.

The tale they whisper concerns these four who lived in the house on Half Moon Street—Wong Kim, the wealthy old merchant, An-lei his beautiful young wife, Sang Poh the scheming clerk, and last but not least, the gray-striped cat which was called Ting-Ling.

Now it was rumored that the beauty of An-lei was worthy of a painting upon silk —that she was slender as the flowering bamboo, and with skin as smooth and flawless as the lotus bud. However, none save Sang Poh the clerk could boast of ever having seen her face, for old Wong Kim was distrustful, and kept his beauteous wife hidden away in strictest *purdah*.

"And why not?" Chinatown asked. "Did not Wong Kim pay out her weight in silver pieces as the marriage-price? He who flaunts his treasures in public is a fool."

Wong Kim might strictly forbid the beautiful An-lei ever to set her dainty foot within his ground-floor shop, and warn Sang Poh the clerk never to pass beyond the devil-screen which barred the doorway to Wong's private quarters, but every wise man knows there are always two paths around a mountain.

For Sang Poh could play with great skill upon his moon-fiddle, such warm-worded songs as "O Dark-eyed Daughter of Delight" and "Love Comes to the Least of Men," knowing full well that An-lei was listening.

And old Wong, whose ears delighted only in the silvery music of Liu Hai the Money God, never noticed that the words of Sang Poh's songs were cleverly altered from day to day, nor that a smile, given and returned in silence, can tell more than a thousand words.

So Sang Poh smiled his secret smile and indulged himself in silken dreams of that day of days when An-lei's aged husband would at last put on the Wooden Robe and journey to his ancestors. Then the old merchant's wealth would fall into the hands of An-lei, and An-lei, rich and beautiful, would fall into the waiting arms of Sang Poh. *Hai!*

But one day as Sang Poh was browsing through some old books, he came upon an antique volume called "The Mirror of Ancient Days." Time had faded the close-set columns of classical Wen-li script, but as he turned the pages at random, he came upon a certain passage which stood forth like a lighted candle in a dark room.

"In the latter days of the Ming Emperors," ran the tale, "it was the Imperial custom to remove ambitious rivals by serving them with tempting dishes containing the finely chopped whiskers of a tiger. These bring forth a grievous illness beyond all cure, and by the eleventh or twelfth day thereafter the groaning spirit of the luckless one takes its departure for the Shadow-world—"

NOW it chanced that as Sang Poh read these ancient words he looked up, and behold! Wong Kim's gray-striped cat Ting-Ling came stepping daintily down the stairs to the shop.

"Hoya!" breathed Sang Poh. "This is clearly a sign and a portent from the Lords of Destiny! For what is a cat but a house-tiger? Aye, a jungle-tiger may be fit and proper for a white-button mandarin, but a house-tiger will certainly suffice for a simple merchant like Wong Kim. *Hai!"*

And swooping up the unsuspecting cat, Sang Poh carried it into a hidden alcove, where he gently and delicately snipped off its stiff white whiskers.

"Mee-ow!" wailed Ting-Ling, rubbing a paw over its clipped muzzle, but Sang Poh bribed it to silence with a bowl of dried fish, and soon the whiskerless Ting was curled up peacefully on the sunny window-sill.

Sang Poh gathered up the shorn bristles and stored them away in a little silver box, after which he carefully cut the fateful page from the book and burned it to crisp

black ash. That night Sang Poh prepared the whiskers in accordance with the ancient formula, and the next day Wong Kim the merchant smacked his lips over a dish of steaming hot *pao tzu,* all unknowing that a secret ingredient had been added.

Two days passed—three days—four—but Wong Kim exhibited no signs of pain or distress. Sang Poh watched him through narrowed lids, fearing that the ancient lore had turned out to be merely another dragon-tale.

But on the fifth night Sang Poh was awakened by the sound of moans from the old merchant's quarters. He sat bolt upright in the dark, listening with all ears and shaking hands with himself in fierce delight.

And in the morning Wong Kim was pale and red-eyed from lack of sleep. "Last night," he complained, "my stomach was filled with a thousand pain-devils, nor would they take flight until I had swallowed three scalding pots of *lung ching* tea."

"An excellent remedy, Master," Sang Poh replied. "Today I will visit the Plum Blossom Joss House and burn red paper prayers that you may be restored to Number One health."

"Hsieh—hsieh!" said Wong Kim, touched by his clerk's interest in his well-being.

But that night Wong Kim's pain-devils returned in even greater force, and presently Sang Poh heard the shivering stroke of the brass gong which stood beside the merchant's sleeping *k'ang.*

Hurrying to his master's quarters, Sang Poh found An-lei anxiously attending her groaning husband. "Sang Poh," An-lei commanded, "hasten at once to Peking Court and bring Meng Tai the apothecary. I fear Wong Kim is grievously ill."

"I go with the speed of an arrow," Sang Poh replied, but he chuckled to himself as he hurried through the midnight hush of the streets to knock at Meng Tai's blue-painted door in Peking Court.

But the apothecary's most expert ministrations could not check the progress of Wong Kim's illness. Ginger water, ginseng and rhubarb root proved useless, and pills as large as grapes had no more effect than the yellow paper prayers burned to Wah Taw, God of Medicine.

The old merchant grew steadily worse, until An-lei insisted that a Rice Face Doctor be called in. Sang Poh was thrown into a sweating fear by this unforeseen development, but the White Devil *kuan* had no better luck than the slant-eyed apothecary.

Indeed, Wong Kim's gnawing pains became so sharp that he moaned by day and by night, and to silence these nerve-wracking cries Sang Poh secretly gave the merchant some of the black *chandoo* pellets which Wong Kim kept hidden in a yellow glaze statue of the Belly God.

At first one pill sufficed for a few hours of silence—then two were necessary—then three—until the night four pellets sent Wong Kim into the Long Sleep. But Sang Poh had the presence of mind to leave the rest of the *chandoo* pills under the merchant's pillow.

The Rice Face Doctor was quite satisfied as to the cause of Wong Kim's death, for An-lei had told him of the merchant's exceeding appetite for candied pork fat, which he had continued to eat up to the very end.

"Pork fat and opium—there's a combination to kill an elephant!" said the Rice Face Doctor as he wrote out the death certificate.

And Sang Poh smiled and said *"Wah!"* as he took eager possession of the death-paper. Sah-jin O'Hara, that Blue Coat Devil, was sure to pay them a visit when he heard the news, but if he asked any pointed questions, Sang Poh had but to show him this writing from the Rice Face Doctor. *Wah!*

Sang Poh was very busy that day—first to Quam Lee's shop on Mandarin Lane to purchase a Number One coffin—then to the *feng-shui* man to order a burial chart drawn

up—and to the scrivener's to have death-prayers painted on strips of white silk—

And then in the evening, a peremptory rapping at the door, and there stood the dreaded Sah-jin O'Hara, come to pay his last respects to his old friend Wong Kim the merchant, lying gaunt and silent upstairs.

SANG POH seized the first opportunity to produce the precious death-paper, but behind his smooth yellow mask his eyes were alert and wary, for the Blue Coat Sah-jin was strangely sparing of questions. Why was the Sah-jin so silent? Why did he look so long and intently at the Rice Face Doctor's writing?

"How long was Wong Kim sick?" O'Hara asked at last.

Sang Poh hesitated, pretending to count. "Eleven days, Sah-jin."

"Eleven days, eh?" O'Hara repeated, looking into the distance. Then he nodded and turned abruptly on his heel to depart.

Sang Poh drew a hissing breath. Why had the Sah-jin stared at him so intently when he asked that question? Why had he repeated the answer? *Tsai!* This sudden feeling of fear was no more than a cloud passing across the sun. What could a Blue Coat Devil know of ancient Ming lore—

But hold! Why had the Sah-jin's departing footsteps suddenly ceased, below there in the shop?

On slippered feet Sang Poh stole stealthily down the stairs, peering out into the half-lighted shop. *Hai!* Sah-jin O'Hara had indeed halted in his tracks—he was staring hard at Ting-Ling the cat, who was stalking lazily along the top of the counter!

Wang pu tau! Why had that cursed cat chosen this unlucky moment to show its whiskerless face! Sang Poh's fingers closed on the hilt of his knife as though it were Ting-Ling's throat—

"Mee-ow!" said Ting, and Sang Poh, his breath caught in his throat, saw the Sah-jin step nearer, still staring. Now the Sah-jin's hand reached out, touching the cat's head, feeling its shorn muzzle! Then with a quick glance around the shop, O'Hara scooped up the cat and started briskly for the street door.

"*Chan-choh!* Halt!" screamed Sang Poh, bounding down the stairs. "You not take cat—no!" In panic terror he leaped toward the Blue Coat Devil, plucking the knife from his sleeve.

O'Hara jerked around at the challenge, hastily dropping the cat as he twisted aside from the sweeping thrust of the knife. Then his hand shot out and fastened on Sang Poh's wrist. A twist—a gasping cry—and the knife clattered to the floor.

And before Sang Poh could gather his frightened wits, the Sah-jin's big fist was twisted in his *shaam,* and Sang Poh's head was being banged against the wall in time to the Sah-jin's grim words, "Now, Sang Poh, we'll have a little talk about this cat! Come on, spill it—all of it!"

"GIMLET-EYE," they call the Sah-jin O'Hara in Chinatown, and those who are tempted to break the Rice Face Law think twice and even thrice before setting foot on the forbidden path, for what secret can be called safe from one who has the magic power of a Gimlet-Eye?

Aya, the Cat without Whiskers casts a long shadow through the crooked streets of Chinatown.

But when the Sah-jin O'Hara is alone, he laughs uproariously at his newly-won name. However, the Sah-jin knows full well the power of legend among the slant-eyed Sons of Han, and so is careful too tell no one that he never even noticed that Wong Kim's cat had lost its whiskers—that he was only about to borrow Ting-Ling for one night, to rid his office of a mouse!

Part II

V Is News

By THEODORE ROSCOE

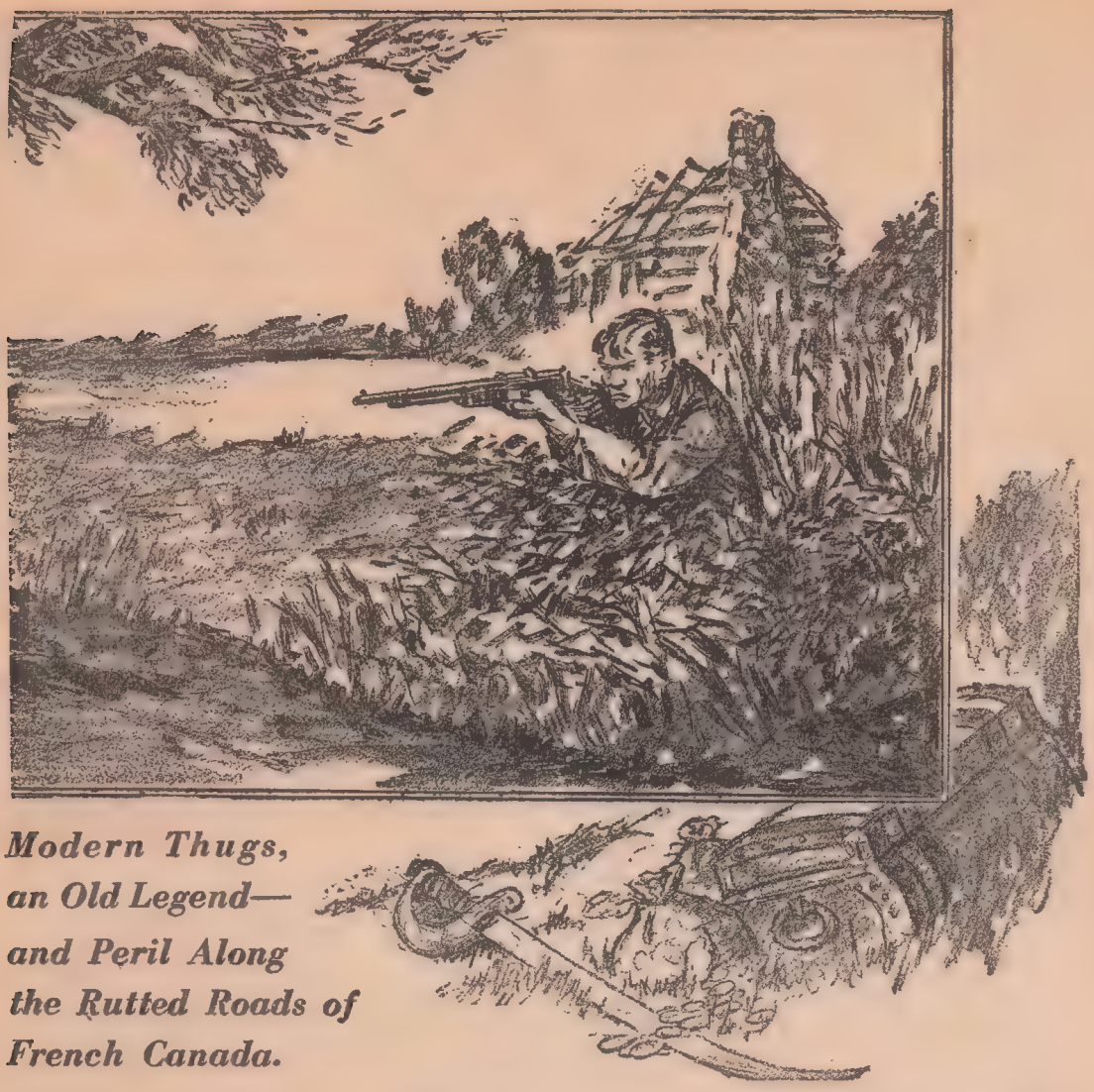
Author of "The Green Handled Dagger," "Luck," etc.

SOMETHING ABOUT THE STORY AND WHAT HAS HAPPENED BEFORE

ANYONE who reads the papers knows that there are prisoners of war in Canada; German fliers constitute many of them, men whose value to Germany is great, men that Hitler would like to see returned to fight once more for the Fatherland.

News of a plan for their mass delivery, their return to Germany has been hinted to a New York newspaper and young Billy Dunbar—rejected for the American Army after too many kinds of mishaps in his reporting business—books himself for a cruise up the Saguenay for an opportunity to investigate the rumor.

He has many strange adventures, beginning when someone searches his stateroom on the ship and going right along when he lands in Quebec for a sightseeing tour of the city. Eland, Tenrec, Unau, names of people he encounters, seem to have a vague connection he cannot place, and back aboard the cruise ship he hears threatening voices vowing to "get Dunbar." They do; he is hurled overboard into the dark waters of the Saguenay and would have drowned had he not been rescued by a girl. A mysterious girl he's noticed on the ship, and who dives in after him and drags him ashore, to the bleak wooded cliffs along the river. Almost before his strength returns she is urging him to make haste so that they can cross the river before day-



Modern Thugs, an Old Legend— and Peril Along the Rutted Roads of French Canada.

light, since "there is danger, Bee-lee. There are those who follow me. Those who wish to overtake."

IX

SO Billy Dunbar hurried. He was relieved, as any man is, to get back into his trousers; his clothing was fairly dry and he was pleased to find a pack of Players drying on a stone and—surprise!—his .32 and holster spread out near the fire. Pants and gun restored confidence—he slung the weapon under his vest—and a hasty pull from a cigarette steadied him.

Launching the boat was a job; the old flat-bottom, weatherbeaten, unpainted, had been there in the bushes a long time. He shoved while the girl dragged; after considerable pushing and hauling they managed to get it down to water's edge, and the exercise revived Billy Dunbar's circulation.

"Oars," the girl pointed. "In the weeds under the cabin window. The tin dipper, too, for she's bound to be leaky. I will put out the fire."

Bonfire extinguished, the pine grove was blue in moonlight, the beach black in shadow. Fog wisped over the shallows, and farther out where the current plunged noisily over unseen rocks, the Saguenay was a sea of swimming vapor. Billy Dunbar gripped the oar handles; the girl sat, dim, in the stern sheets, facing him; they were away.

"Upstream against the current," the girl

directed. "The rapids are below. In midstream we will be safe, Bee-lee. At least," she brushed back her hair and peered off, "from the rocks."

Billy hauled on the oars, digging in. He kept inshore where the mist was thinner, tinctured with moonray, and after fifteen or twenty minutes of arduous labor, when the crush of surf was a distant mutter astern, he swung away from the shoreline into smoother water. They were rounding a shadowy, black headland, and the slower current gave Billy a chance to rest on the oar-handles.

"Who's chasing you?" he asked the girl bluntly.

She had been peering back over her shoulder. Moonlight touched her hair as she faced him.

"Many," she answered in that intriguing, husky voice. I do not know how many there are, but close on my track are four. The little man, the big man, the thin man and the fat."

"They sound like stinkers," Billy Dunbar nodded, "but who, why; can't you be a little more explicit?"

"Bee-lee," she said, "I am going to tell you about it, for I think it is only fair that you should know. These people who are after me are dangerous; I think they would stop at nothing. You see," she leaned toward him earnestly, "while you are with me, it is not safe for you."

SAFE? The girl was extraordinary. She rescued him from drowning, brought him back to life on a woodsy beach, coolly informed him that she was being pursued and warned him—after saving him like that—that he wasn't safe in her company. He squinted at her in unbelief. Fog on the water—patches of moonbeam—scent of pine on salty wind—he still wasn't certain this was not some sort of illusion.

"Friend," he tried to make his tone sound stern, "if anyone's been hounding you, I'd be the last guy in the world to duck out on you. Give me the word on these four who've annoyed you, and I'll flatten them like griddle cakes. You hold all my mortgages, Evangeline. I owe you the works. Anything I can do to help pay off—"

"Non!" she protested, vehemently. "I do not want you to feel like that."

"Well, that's the way I feel." Billy swung the drifting rowboat toward midchannel. "Just steer me on where you want to go, and we'll go there. And these four who are after you—" an unpleasant possibility struck him; he scowled, worried. "Look here, you—you aren't in trouble with the police?"

Not that it mattered, obligated as he was. Even *not* obligated, Billy Dunbar felt he would have helped this young lady out of anything short of murder.

But she laughed, "The police?" and when she laughed, Billy Dunbar thought of water rippling over sunny stones. And how swiftly her face could change expression. For they passed through a misty shaft of moonlight then, and her eyes clouded, darkening; again Billy Dunbar glimpsed that deep, frightened dilation.

"No, Bee-lee, they are not the police. They are after me," she said tensely, "because I have something they want very badly—something that would be worth to them a great deal. I am sure they would not hesitate to kill me for it, and I know they are after me, for the thin one I saw on the cruise ship. But the one I fear most," her eyes dilated, "is the fat."

"Fat," Billy nodded.

"Enormous," she shuddered. "Gross! Bald! Horrible! A great, outthrust stomach! Accordeon-pleated neck! Layers of chin! He whom the others call Addax."

Billy Dunbar stopped rowing. His head was a dark attic full of cobwebs in which his memory groped to find an electric lightbulb.

"Oui," the mahogany-haired girl went on, "he followed me from Montreal, I know. I saw him on the dock at Quebec." She drew a breath; paused. Then, "Tell

me," her wide, gray eyes fixed on Billy, "did you ever hear of the Voyageur Levasseur?"

"Uh?" He was still groping for that light-bulb in his mind.

"The Legend of Levasseur—Le Seur, for short," the girl leaned forward. "Of the million gold *Louis* and the Three Wise Men?"

Billy knew his face must be funny, like an apple-pie in the moon-fog. Because the girl was opening her handbag; fumbling to take out something and balance it on her knee. And Billy's mouth gaped unlatched like the bag when he recognized what the object was. That toy-sized, carved-wood image of an Arab on a camel.

"The Three Wise Men, Bee-lee," she murmured. "The rarest relics in all French Canada. Like the Wise Men of the East, they shall lead us. For the First shall tell us where to find the Second; the Second shall take us to the Third; and the Third will show us the hiding place of the treasure. *Voilà!* That is why they follow me. They know I possess the First Wise Man—"

Click! the light was on in Billy Dunbar's brain. The scene came clear—Quebec—*Le Petit Marmot*—a darkened barroom off a gas-lit hallway—low-pitched converse behind swinging doors—

"Them Three Wise Men has played plenty of hell around the Saguenay—"

"They're worth about two million if they lead to the treasure—"

"They will lead to it, John; it is a true tale—"

"Addax says the girl's got it, so it's the girl we gotta start with—"

So this was the girl—this enchanting tourist—that little figure on her knee was a Wise Man—and Addax was a fat man pursuing her. For some reason, inexplicable, the name was suggestive of Eyra the Fan Dancer—of that murderous cutthroat, Tenrec—and Eland of the taffy hair.

"Good Lord!" Billy Dunbar whispered.

For those other names had reminded him of his own hazardous status—Canada was at war with Germany—he had come up here to follow a tip about a prison break, and McAuliff's "little bird" had been found dead on 85th Street, and he, himself, had been found out by the men with iron in their teeth. They'd nearly got him, too. Sitting in on a game of draw poker, he'd found himself playing blackjack deuces wild.

As though to further remind him, an oar-handle, loose in the row-lock, tapped him three short taps under the chin, and then a long.

Billy seized the oars uncertainly. The rowboat was drifting portwise into blowing moon-fog. It was no time to have the girl pick up that image from her knee, gaze at it intently, then aim a finger at the mist-hidden channel of the Saguenay.

"Row, Bee-lee, row! The Wise Man says go *that* way!"

BILLY DUNBAR went that way. As far as he was concerned, one direction was as good as another out there on the fog-hemmed Saguenay. This side or that side of the fiord, it didn't matter. His arms and legs were making a good come-back, but there was still a lump of pain under the scalp behind his right ear and his brain was numb. He pulled long, deep breaths, trying to clear it. Hallucinations persisted. One of them was that the girl in the stern sheets of this rowboat, after saving him from drowning and very competently restoring him to life, had spoken of a treasure hunt and Three Wise Men who would lead to that treasure—and then held a little image up to her face, murmuring, "The Wise Man says go *that* way—"

Billy shook wisps of fog from his nose. Filled his lungs. Exhaled—aaaah. He had come out of the ether before. That time at Bellevue when one of Luciano's rats had winged him, he'd waked up from the operating table reciting Lincoln's Gettysburg address. And in that Hartford hospital,

a casualty to the New England hurricane, he'd thought himself up in an airplane doing loops for several days.

"Hell!" said Billy Dunbar. His left oar caught a crab, throwing a shower of water into his face. He cleared his eyes with a

fist, expecting, naturally, to open them and discover the mahogany-haired girl was gone. She wasn't. She was sitting there barefoot in gray slacks and white blouse, a Scotch-plaid blanket around her, her eyes fixed on that wooden trinket in her hand.

Billy feathered the oars and stared at her.

"Evangeline," he tried her name.

"Yes, Bee-lee?" looking up.

"You—you mean to say that piece of carved wood you've got there—is telling you which way to go?"

The boat broke through a fog-bank as through a curtain of gauze, and moonlight bathed the girl's face in mystery.

"It tells me, Bee-lee, yes. You are rowing now toward a wall of granite cliffs, steep and high. Proceed at the base of these cliffs and you will come to a narrow gulf, an inlet which leads to a secluded cove. Finally, at the end of the cove, we will find a pebbly beach, a mossy bank, a great, ancient tree. The tree—but we will come to that."

Billy said huskily, "The little image tells you this?"

"The First Wise Man leads us so," she answered quietly, gaze intent on the object in her hand. "It shows the way."

Billy Dunbar gritted his teeth and worked the oars. It was too bad. Either that whack on the head had left him squirrely, or this girl was—dreamy was the nicest word. Her head was lowered; worriedly he scrutinized her. Normal? Hell, a girl as picturesque as this—walk off with a job in any Park Ave. model agency—a girl who'd dive off a ship at night to save a man overboard—well, maybe she had a fixation of some kind.

She raised her eyes to meet his worried squint.

"Keep rowing, Bee-lee. We are nearing the granite cliffs now. The fog is thinning; if you will turn your head you can see them."

Billy Dunbar turned his head. Looming darkly through the steamy haze, perhaps a quarter mile off the bow, stood a shadowy escarpment. He could discern craggy cliff-tops silhouetted against stars, and hear the crush of surf on lower rocks. He had been rowing for over an hour—had he rowed too far? That shore looked as naked and desolate as the Styx.

"Is that where we're going?"

"A little way farther and you will see the gulf."

Perspiration streamed down his cheek-bones as he tugged the oars. Warm work rowing against this current. Yet something down near his heart was increasingly cold; if he stopped to analyze this, he was going to be scared. Night and ice-black water and moon-set weren't a help. Undoubtedly this girl was expressing herself in the metaphor of French Canada, but there were some strange angles to this country of wooded shores and Northern Lights, and some strange angles to this unusual girl.

He crabbed an oar, and the splash startled a white gull that sailed off into the mist with a lonely, forlorn cry—the cry startled Billy into a head-twist. So he saw

they were skirting a high, black headland, and swinging in toward a canyon-like opening that made a defile between cloudy cliffs.

He faced about, a little dazed. "There's the gulf, all right. You—you picked it right out of the fog."

She said soberly, "The First Wise Man leads us, Bee-lee."

"But I don't understand," he panted. "I don't see—"

"Ah," she nodded. "To those who have eyes, the Wise Man points the way. It would be a foolish guide who misleads the blind." Gray mist washed over the rowboat, enveloping them, and she waited for a windgust to clear the vapor. "You Americans from the States," she went on quietly, "you have blinded yourselves to many things, *mon ami.* Your streets of stone and iron, your high buildings have perhaps cut off the view. We who dwell nearer the open, closer to the works of Nature, perhaps our eyes are better able to penetrate distances and darks. Do you understand?"

BILLY DUNBAR didn't understand, but he nodded. The girl in a polite way was trying to tell him he was a little thick. Still, it didn't explain how she'd navigated this dark fiord in the night. He put his back to the rowing as the old flat-bottom beat into a stretch of lively water, bumping along over whitecaps. Spray swept over the gunwale, wetting his thigh. His socks were awash in bilge, and he realized in new anxiety that the bottom-boards were leaking.

Matter-of-factly his companion set the wooden curio on the seat beside her; picked up the tin dipper; began to bail. A rip tide was rounding the headland, and Billy had to brace his feet on the thwart and bend all his energy to the oars before he gained the shelter of the cliff-walled gulf where the water was quieter. The gulf was full of night and star-shine; fog wisped up from the water in cobwebby tendrils; seen close-up the surrounding granite bluffs were higher than he'd imagined.

Panting from exertion, Billy Dunbar rested raw hands on the oars; it was still a good distance to that breach in the cliffs ahead. He started to light a cigarette.

"No," the girl said.

He looked at her questioningly.

"Not yet," she cast a backward glance toward mid-channel. "If fishermen are out there, or lumber scows, a light might be noticed. Wait, Bee-lee, until we are in the cove."

He didn't object to caution; he had his own ill-wishers to avoid. A moment's lackadaisy, and they'd almost murdered him. Part of his mind, during this nocturnal row, had been occupied with conjectures as to who they were—that gloved hand, that German oath, that growl that had sounded like Mr. Eland — they'd thrown him off the cruise ship, and the ship was gone, and what was he going to do now? But the girl was the problem in the foreground; this lady who'd dived into the Saguenay to save him, with that wooden relic in her handbag—

"You're still worried about those four guys you told me about? That fellow Addax?"

She nodded.

"Just who are they?"

"I am not certain," she said slowly. "I have only seen them together once. Addax brought them to my antique shop in Montreal. He posed as an antique dealer, you comprehend. A Belgian refugee come to Canada with antiques. *Alors,* pull a little on your right oar, Bee-lee."

He rowed awhile, intent on the shore. They were nearing that inlet, now, and shadowed by the looming cliffs the gulf was like midnight, the screened water an expanse of polished ebony. It was very still. Morning couldn't be far away, and the steep crags topped with woods, the dimly visible ledges, the indigo sky above seemed to be waiting.

"Tell me more about Addax," Billy invited.

"He wants to get from me the First Wise Man."

"Where," Billy peered at the girl's silhouette, "did *you* get it?"

"To understand," she said gently, "you would have to know the legend of the Voyageur Levasseur and the million gold *Louis*. On your left oar, now, Bee-lee. Around that slab of rock and you will be in the inlet." She stood up, shook out her hair, rearranged the blanket about her shoulders and nestled down with a sigh.

"Good," she expelled a breath as Billy worked the rowboat to starboard and they slid into a narrow canyon where the water lay as a pavement of black glass between granite-slabbed walls that stood up as the sides of buildings. "I think we are out of view, now. Proceed along this channel, and I will tell you the story as the *habitants* of the Saguenay have told it over their hearthstones for three hundred years. Then perhaps you will see about the Wise Man. Perhaps you will believe—"

X

AND there the gray-eyed girl with the mahogany hair and the figure to make a dame-wise newspaper man turn his head, pulled the blanket around her and held the little wooden carving on her knee, and told to Billy Dunbar the legend of Levasseur's gold *Louis* and the Three Wise Men.

And Billy Dunbar who'd come to French Canada on other matters, and nearly suffered a fatal accident, listened. Rowing along that canyon-walled waterway in an early-morning silence where the creak of row-locks and the plash of dipping blades made the only sound, he couldn't help but listen. It was a wonderful setting for a story—the mists lifting and the cliffs developing in shades of gray and far overhead the sky lightening with tints of pale green and blue. The girl was a wonderful story-teller with that low, huskily-accented voice and quaint manner of speech, and the tale she told was wonderful, too.

"It was along this very inlet," she began, "a long, long time ago, that the Voyageur Levasseur—called Le Seur, for short—adventured with his band of pirate explorers."

Before Wolfe, it was. Before Père Marquette. At the time of Champlain. Canada was little known then—a place of great empty blanks on the map—a few straggly lines and settlements beyond the Provinces Maritimes. Like all similar explorers, Levasseur sought a Northwest Passage, and like all similar adventurers, he paid his way by piracy.

Others have been credited with discovering the Saguenay, but the legend gave first honors to Levasseur. Others have gone down in history as greater, more vicious pirates, but Levasseur, according to the legend, took first prize at piracy, too.

Le Seur, they called him—The Sweat. Because his dark French face was always dripping from the grease of lust. Because his exertions to satisfy that lust—stabbing, pillaging, fighting, conspiring to murder—bathed his cruel countenance in streams of poison squeezed from his soul.

Gold, he wanted. Gold. And since the wilderness along the St. Lawrence gave no promise of the metal, he explored no further than the country of the Saguenay, and turned back to scourge the North Atlantic seas. He did an A-1 job, according to the legend—a job to make Morgan, Blackbeard, Captain Kidd and later, better-known buccaneers bite their cutlasses in envy. Galleons sank in flames before his spitting guns. Brave seamen walked the plank. Tortured by his jackal crew, captains delivered the last coin from secret strongboxes. Fair ladies cut their throats to spare themselves the ordeal of his captivity.

The seas ran red where Levasseur had sailed; the sharks trailed his ship in schools, assured of a plentiful harvest. Gold he sweated for, and gold he got, taking only bags of nuggets or hard money. Much he

spent in uproarious returns to France; much he lost at the gaming tables; much he hid away. It was his conceit to one day return to Paris and rival the splendor of the king, and to this end he converted his blood-stained treasure into coin of the realm. *Louis.* Shining, yellow *Louis* obtained from the money-changers of France's Atlantic ports. Not trusting the king or the minions of the law, he would store these bags of money in a hiding place in Canada, far from the reach of soldiery. Then, when age began to gray his brutal beard—and setting a precedent for future pirates and similar criminals—he abandoned buccaneering and settled down in gaudy luxury in France to enjoy his ill-gotten gains.

Cunning Levasseur! Whenever he needed money he would dispatch a ship to Canada and draw from his hidden hoard. Left in charge of this fabulous treasure-trove was his trusted lieutenant, a villainous giant whose armor had won him the nickname of the Black Guardsman.

Long in the great pirate's service, this monster villain was Le Seur's devoted slave, sworn to defend his master's treasure to the death, a terrible and faithful watchdog. Woe to marauding Indians, to chance explorers, to any who came near the gold *cache* other than those armed with Le Seur's written instructions and the secret password. Through the bitter Canadian winters, the savage wilderness summers, day and night the Black Guardsman stood watch, slaying any who trespassed with his sword.

"We must not forget the Black Guardsman," the girl interrupted her narrative to warn Billy Dunbar. "He is as important to this legend as Le Seur. Conceive of this giant in ebony cuirass carrying a broadsword too heavy for three ordinary men to lift. A great dumb monster, as loyal to his master as Satan's advocate. *Alors.* I have wondered if it was from this ancient outlaw we have coined the word blackguard."

She mused a moment, gazing into the gorge ahead of Billy. Daybreak was near, the air very still, the boat's prow advancing with a purling ripple. A translucent gloaming enveloped them. Looking up, Billy saw a great blue heron suspended in azure solitude. They might, he thought, be a million miles from the nearest habitation, the first adventurers to this part of the world. Had the girl declared they were nearing the Seven Cities of Cibola he could almost believe it.

"Go on, Evangeline," he said. "It's a good story."

Levasseur? In Paris he was received as all millionaires are received—to the public what matters it where a rich man gets his money? A great chateau, wine, women, song, Levasseur glutted on everything gold could buy. But (said the girl with a head-shake to Billy Dunbar) gold cannot buy everything. Almost everything, but not quite everything. It cannot buy one's peace with God.

Levasseur the Voyageur, with old age gleaming like frost in his beard, began to want to buy that peace. He had ravaged and raged, pillaged and burned, and now in the twilight of his life he desired contentment. There was no contentment for the Voyageur Levasseur.

For he was Le Seur—The Sweat—Le Seur, the pirate, butcher, murderer — Le Seur the greedy, who had slain his fellow men by the hundred to glut that avid greed. Whereas he had sweated before in the violence of his lust for gold, he sweated now in the memory of his crimes—the shrieks of tortured women, the cries of victims condemned to the plank, the moans of the dying were forever in his ears. The blood-red seas, the anguished faces of those he murdered, haunted his eyes.

He confessed his sins, he endowed a monastery, he built a cathedral. But the monastery was destroyed by an earthquake, the cathedral was demolished by fire, there was no absolution for Le Seur; the sweat of remorse would not dry on him.

"He could not bribe his way into heaven," the mahogany-haired girl murmured to Billy Dunbar. "Perhaps *le bon Dieu* would forgive him—I think so, Beelee—but Le Seur, the Sweat, he could not forgive himself. That was his punishment, you comprehend; he could not forgive himself. And when you are old and rich and have spent a life in wickedness and find yourself dying, it is terrible not to be able to make peace with yourself."

SUCH was Le Seur's soul-agony as he lay dying in his lavish chateau on Christmas Eve. No friends, no loved ones gathered at his bedside to wish him *bon voyage,* for a millionaire living is one thing, and a millionaire dying is another. His majordomo had looted the parlors and fled. His servants had looted the pantries, wine cellars, linen closets and gone. His hostlers had departed, looting the stables. His only faithful friend, the Black Guardsman, was in far-off New France guarding his secret treasury. Alone he lay dying in his huge, barren chateau, sweating as though on the grids of hell.

And it was Christmas Eve—Noel—snow sifting down; Paris a-twinkle with candles; church bells softly pealing from Notre Dame. Possibly *le bon Dieu,* pitying the anguish of Le Seur the pirate, wished to relieve that anguish a little. Possibly even for such as Le Seur repentance brings a benison.

A timid rap at his door. It peeped open a little. Then into the gray, stark death-chamber tiptoed a little girl—the gardener's daughter—bearing two Christmas candles, a sprig of holly and the little figures of the crêche, Joseph and Mary, the Babe in the Manger, the Three Wise Men brought to Bethlehem by the Star. These she placed on the table by the dying pirate's bed; as he roused himself to stare at the blessed scene, she tiptoed out.

"Ah, Le Seur was touched then," the story-teller related to Billy Dunbar. "To think that at the last had come this little peasant girl. He stared at the Holy Manger, the Saints and the Mother of Mercy, *oui,* and some of the water of agony dried on his forehead as he stared. *Tiens!* He rose from his bed to touch the figures. He wept for the little French child who had brought them. To him, there, on his night of dying came a last idea."

God did not want his gold, that he saw. But why not leave it for the future of such children as this gardener's daughter, this tiny peasant child with love in her heart—leave it for the benefit of France? *Pour la France*—that was what he would do! He would leave the great treasure to his country, that the money might be washed clean in the service of his people.

Then Levasseur groaned. Whom could he trust? Could he trust the French king, a selfish monarch who cared no more for the people than for mongrel dogs? Could he trust the Cardinal, mixed up with court intrigues and temporal diplomacy? The nobles were a sly, self-seeking lot; his own household was treacherous; whom could he trust with a vast fortune of gold *Louis?*

He was dying; there was little time; he fell to his knees before the Manger scene, asking help. The Wise Men—the three who had followed the Star to Bethlehem—he found himself considering those figures. The First was mounted on a camel, gazing ahead. The Second was standing on its feet, an incense-urn in its hands, gazing down. The Third was in the pose of genuflexion, eyes uplifted. Levasseur picked up the little wooden figures in his hand.

These he could trust—these Three Wise Men, to send across the Atlantic seas as emissary to the treasure in French Canada. Le Seur had an inspiration and he set to work. All night he worked; all Christmas morning; all Christmas Day. When he was done, he had imposed upon the Three Wise Men his instructions.

"Instructions?" Billy Dunbar asked, as his story-teller broke off, her gaze fixed on the little image balanced on her

knee. Billy's own eyes were fixed on that carved wood figure of an Arab on a camel. About nine inches high, the carving, seen in the light of early morning, assumed proportions of mystery and significance. Its paint was worn to a faded blur; the wood was cracking, chipped; it looked authentically old.

The girl's gray eyes smiled softly.

"Yes, Bee-lee, his instructions. Levasseur did not trust the courtiers of Old World France. Only too well he understood the greed for gold. Too easy, *vous voyez,* to send one of his captains to the treasure-store, then have that captain, knowing he was dead, keep the fortune for himself. But three he could send, each with a Wise Man as a guide, each Wise Man endowed with certain informative directions. The First would guide the party so far. The Second would guide the party a certain distance beyond that. The Third would lead the final journey to the treasure. Singly the Wise Men would be useless; only together would they lead to the final destination. *Enfin,* such a device would serve to keep the three emissaries together, so that no individual could steal the fortune for himself. Where it is easy for one to steal a treasure, it is not so easy for three. So reasoned Levasseur."

Billy Dunbar nodded as though he understood. He was forgetting to row. Daylight was coming softly into the gorge, dissolving the shadows which cobwebbed the sheer, rock walls; the boat drifted as through the substance of a dream.

The mahogany-haired girl murmured on, "So reasoned Levasseur, and on that Christmas night he was done. The Three Wise Men were ready. Summoning the little French girl from his window, he dispatched her with a letter making his wishes known to the king. Three of France's most trustworthy couriers were to sail, each with a Wise Man in his possession, three together. They were to go to the treasure-store in New France, return together with the gold, act as trustees in its dispersal to the poor French people. At last, in a measure of contentment, the pirate could die. According to the legend, there was no sweat on the forehead of Le Seur when he died."

THERE was sweat on Billy Dunbar's forehead. Rounding a bend in the gorge, the rowboat nudged a mossy boulder, and Billy, fending off with an oar, saw they had come through the cliffs to a sort of recessed bay—a cove in the hollow of green bluffs, cool and tinted as a lake in Switzerland. As the girl had predicted, there were a pebbly beach at cove's end, a mossy bank, a tall, old tree.

"Voila," she nodded in the face of his surprise. "The First Wise Man has not misinformed us. Nor did he misinform those three emissaries from Paris, for this, according to the legend, is where he led them." Her voice fell so abruptly that it startled Billy Dunbar. "This," she whispered, "is where the owner of the Third Wise Man killed the other two."

Billy stared around. Fish were rising in the cove, inscribing on the water a series of concentric circles. The bay was a blue mirror; the air was pink with new light; the green bluffs inverted in motionless watery reflection. Impossible to believe murder had ever shocked the peace of this Canadian Eden.

"True, Bee-lee, perhaps on a morning such as this. For when the three emissaries realized that the First Wise Man had directed them accurately, they knew Le Seur's treasure-trove must be a fact. Straightaway they started fighting. The holder of the Third slew the first two; seized all the Wise Men for himself. By himself, he started out after the gold-hoard. The gold was too accurst. Even at the end, Le Seur's dying hope was not to be realized."

But that murderous French courier did not get the treasure. Not he! With the Wise Men in his possession, he reached the hiding place, all right; according to the legend, he got there in a hurry.

"But then," the girl told Billy Dunbar, "there was one final barrier to pass. This is where he comes in. The Black Guardsman!"

The giant in black armor! Levasseur, on his death-bed, had forgotten the faithful guard. Had neglected to give the emissaries the password, the Open Sesame which would permit the Black Guardsman to let them enter the secret treasure-store. Following the lead of the Three Wise Men, step by step, the murderous emissary reached the spot where the gold was hidden, only to be promptly slain by the fierce sentinel.

"Eh bien," the girl digressed from her story with a gesture, and her eyes on Billy Dunbar were luminous. "Now we arrive at the strangest part of the legend. That first courier who tried to steal the treasure for himself lost his life. When the first party never returned with Le Seur's gold, the French king, itching to have it in his own hands, sent out an expedition. That expedition was lost. Others followed. They, too, failed in their mission. The legend says, Bee-lee, that the Black Guardsman struck them down."

The hunt for Le Seur's hidden treasure went on. Year after year, expeditions searching for the gold went out from France. In the Canadian wilderness they perished. No one knew just where to look for the treasure. It was recalled that the Three Wise Men would lead the way. What had become of those wooden relics? Find them, and they would reveal the hiding place of the gold. Soon the search for the gold-store became a search for the Three Wise Men. But they, according to the legend, had become separated.

An Indian had perhaps discovered them near the entrance to the treasure-store where the greedy emissary had dropped them. Unaware of their significance, the Indian had later tossed them away. Then a trapper might find them, a woodsman or an explorer. They led to the treasure each time, but each time, inexorably on duty, the Black Guardsman would slay the trespassers who came.

"Le Seur had given him his orders," the girl declared. "A great, dumb monster trained only to obey, he followed his master's command. Others learned the secret of the Three Wise Men and followed them to the door of the gold hoard. But always the Black Guardsman was there to kill them at the last. The legend has it that he stands there to this day."

"To this day?" Billy Dunbar exclaimed.

"That is the story, Bee-lee. For the gold has never been found, and many who went in search of it failed to return. Several captains of the Comte de Frontenac, seeking the treasure in 1672 were lost. British adventurers at the time of Wolfe vanished in the quest. Since then dozens of fortune-hunters have never returned alive from this gold-search. The old *habitants* of French Canada will tell you the Black Guardsman is still on watch."

SHE smiled to let Billy Dunbar know she considered this part of the legend sheer fable. "Yet I have heard old *habitants* swear it is true. I am sure my great-grandmother believed devoutly in this imperishable treasure-guard. The tale used to scare me as a little girl. My grandfather once met a woodcutter who swore he'd lost his way in a storm, stumbled into a cave somewhere and seen the Black Guardsman. Later, two trappers seeking that cave did not come back. But Le Seur's gold is not folklore," she shook her head. "Do you understand now why this First Wise Man is so valuable?"

He murmured, "You—you believe they'll lead to the gold—"

"With the other two, *oui!*"

"But I don't get it—how they're supposed to *lead.*"

"Observe," she held up the relic. "Examine closely, you will notice certain inscriptions carved into the figure's cloak. Difficult to make out; the script in Norman French. The work of the dying Levasseur.

A description of French Canada, this gorge, this cove of the Saguenay."

"How," Billy Dunbar squinted, "do you —know it's genuine?"

Her deep, gray eyes met his, serenely confident. "I have made a study of antiques. My shop at Montreal. Always the legend of Le Seur's gold fascinated me. There was a rumor that the last man known to have had the Three Wise Men in his possession was an old *habitant* of this Saguenay, a half-breed Indian who did not know the meaning of the relics. The First Wise Man he sold to a tourist who took it, unknowing, to France. So the *habitant* related to my father thirty years ago, who in turn told the tale to me. My father did not believe the halfbreed's tale; nor did I. But then—"

"Then?" Billy prompted as the girl paused.

She seemed to be studying his face, a little hesitant. She said, "All right, Bee-lee, you shall know the rest. In a Paris pawnshop the First Wise Man gathered dust. Until last spring when it was found by an antiquarian who recognized it at once. This dealer knew that I, a French-Canadian, had advertised for the relic in catalogues. To my shop in Montreal he came; it was he who put this First Wise Man in my hands."

Billy started to ask a question, and the girl said, "Wait. That Paris dealer came as a refugee from Occupied France. On the boat over he—he told me he was trailed. By whom he did not know. *Alors,* the very night he delivered the relic to me, he was found dead. In his Montreal hotel. Gun in hand. Shot. A suicide note. As so many other poor refugees. But I—" Her voice fell, "I am convinced he was murdered."

"Good Godfrey!" Billy stared.

"The very next morning in my shop appeared the fat man, Addax and his companions. Asking to buy the relic. From the price offered, I knew they were aware of what it was. That afternoon I closed my shop and took the Saguenay cruise boat. One of Addax's companions—the thin one —I saw on board. Addax I glimpsed on the dock at Quebec. So I knew they were after me, and that night you bumped into me, I—I was planning to slip away from the boat. To leave ship while all were asleep."

Billy Dunbar exhaled. "That's why you were so scared?"

"Terrified," she admitted. "I thought maybe you also were on my trail. I fled to, and locked myself into my stateroom. That is why I was on deck in the fog last night when you went overboard. My handbag fastened to a life-belt, I was planning to slip overboard, myself, and swim ashore."

Billy Dunbar found the oars stuck in his grip, the rowboat at a standstill on the tinted, cliff-locked bay. "All by yourself? My God!"

"As the Wise Man directed. To this cove. Bee-lee, the halfbreed who told my father of these relics, he had his shack on this very beach. To the trunk of that big tree, long ago, he nailed the Second Wise Man—the standing figure, *oui*—as a totem figurehead. Thirty hands above ground, he told my father. That is where the image should be."

BILLY swung around on the thwart to stare at the tree. They were as yet some three hundred yards from the pebbly beach; he came out of the doldrum with a snap. "You think it's still here?"

"I never bothered before to look for it. I never believed. Not until the First Wise Man was brought to me from Paris. Fantastic, is it not? The Third Wise Man, too, is near. The halfbreed said he gave it to the little French church at Bagotville."

"Where the ship docks today—"

"Yes," she breathed, "we must hurry. Lest certain cruise passengers might go ashore and by chance visit the church ahead of us. For the First Wise Man brings us only to this cove. The Second will guide us on from here. But it is the Third which

reveals the hiding place of the treasure by its eyes."

Billy gasped across stalled oar-handles. "By its eyes—"

"It will gaze at the spot, Bee-lee. At the wall or door—I know not—behind which the gold lies hidden. Follow the Third Wise Man's gaze. So says the legend told in French Canada these three hundred years."

Something collapsed under Billy Dunbar's belt—a nervous breakdown of credulity. This treasure story had seemed credible, almost rational. But the gaze of a wooden image—the eyes of a carved antique—

"Mais non!" she read his expression of dismay. "Please do not disbelieve. An old story? Mystic folklore? I, myself, do not understand. We can only trust, and keep faith. For the legend says only he with the right spirit in his heart can find the gold. Only he who comes as Le Seur intended can pass the Black Guardsman. That is why the emissaries of the king, of Cardinal Richelieu, the soldiers and explorers of a later day all failed. Levasseur intended that treasure for the people of France. And that is why I seek it, Bee-lee," she appealed with outstretched hands. "For France, as Levasseur willed it. For France, more needed now than in all its history. For *Free* France!"

That gave Billy Dunbar an emotional punch he hadn't expected. Tingles currented down his spine. This girl was hunting a legendary gold-hoard for Free France!

She murmured, "We must have faith, Bee-lee. Faith!" and wasn't that what the Scotch officer with the paralyzed arm had declared last night at dinner? Wasn't that why the two priests, Fathers Pangolin and Dasyure were making a pilgrimage to Ste. Anne de Beaupré? Wasn't that why Canada was at war? Why he, himself, was in Canada? Faith in God, or faith in Democracy, or—lots of things in the world you had to take on faith?

Billy pumped the oars. Gravel snarled under the bottomboards, a shock passed through the rowboat's hull; they were on the pebble beach.

XI

THE beach. The mossy bank. In the foreground the tree. Never in Arcady was there a more delightful picnic-spot. At the left the underbrush grew to water's edge, lush and fragrant. At the right a little waterfall trailed a silver veil down the rocks, pooled, then flowed down the bank across a beaver dam. Birds twittered. Darning-needles buzzed. Leaping from the rowboat, Billy startled a pair of beavers which took to their pond, splash, splash. The little spade-tailed animals gave the scene a touch of wild-life remoteness a treasure hunt should have.

"See," the girl pointed, "there are still the ruins of the old half-breed *habitant's* cabin."

Some collapsed, mouldering boards; the crumbled masonry of a fireplace chimney on the edge of the underbrush. Billy's scrutiny swerved to the tree. An elm, moss-backed, knotty, old as Father Time. Sunlight filtered down through its forest of upper limbs, patterning the beach with shade. Beavers had gnawed the bark from its humpbacked trunk. Its roots were buried under generations of moss and leaves.

"The image should be there, Bee-lee. Thirty hands above ground where the half-breed nailed it to the trunk. Come."

Billy Dunbar was already running. Forgetting he was in socks, he stubbed his toe on a root; hopped the rest of the way. Mindless of bare feet and pebbles, the girl darted ahead of him, crying, "Thirty hands would be fifteen feet! About the height of that lowest limb!"

At the tree's base she halted, searching the trunk with her eyes. "I—I don't see it, do you?"

Billy hobbled around the tree, squinting

up. Nothing. Hands on hips, he stepped back. No sign of anything nailed to the trunk thirty hands above ground. Disappointment writhed his mouth. A sense of chagrin. Someone else must've found it; maybe it had never even been there.

And what else, he asked himself, could he have expected from this wonderful bedtime story? The girl was romantic, dreamy. Some refugee had palmed off a relic on her, then shot himself. She remembered a childhood fable, set out on a Rainbow Trail, fancied herself followed. Girls were always imagining things; she was part French, too.

"But swell—" Billy reminded himself. "Pulled me out of the drink. I've got to help her."

His intention, as he stepped around the tree, was to laugh it off; suggest reasonably that the treasure was, after all, a legend; that she abandon such fantastic business, let him escort her to the nearest village and send her home.

"Well," he said bluffly, arriving at her side, "I don't see anything—" he broke off bewilderedly. She was crying. Hugging the little, carved cameleer to her heart, face upturned to the tree, tears shining on her cheek. Tears dropping on the moss at her red-tipped toes.

Unconsolably she whispered, "It is gone. Someone must have seen it—taken it. Oh, Bee-lee, I had counted so much — for France."

Billy Dunbar stood on one sock, then the other. Abashed by the anguish in that lovely face. He never knew what to do when a girl burst into tears, and up here in this charming, French-Canadian limberlost—

But Billy Dunbar didn't have to solve that one.

"Put up your hands!" the command cut into his bewilderment like a whip-crack. "Put them up, *vite!* I got you covered!"

Out of the underbrush hedging the ruined cabin came a long, gleaming, rifle-barrel. Behind the gun-barrel, out of the leafage, came a pair of glittering black eyes. Then a smudged, monkey-like, urchin face. Then with a rustle, stepping out into the sunshine, the barefoot gamin who had escorted Billy to the *Petit-Marmot* clipjoint in Quebec!

Billy's hand, about to rest on the crying girl's shoulder, froze. The girl drew a sobbing breath, *"Mon Dieu!"* The gamin sidled forward cautiously, aiming the gun.

Billy said, aware of thickness in his tone, "Lower that rifle, you little rat! What's a kid like you—"

"Kid?" the voice came harsh, crow-like. "I will show you I am a kid if you do not keep up the hands. You, too, Ma'mselle. Up!"

Hackles on Billy's necknape rose with his palms. Once again he felt the queer chill of this urchin's button-black eyes. For the eyes were older than any barefoot boy's —old, wise and peculiarly evil. The voice was old, too. A gasp escaped the girl at Billy's side.

"It's the midget—the little man—one of Addax's companions!"

"Ah, we have met before, Ma'mselle," the urchin face puckered. "By coincidence, your gentleman friend, too. Stand where you are. Do not move." Raising his head, he sent a shrill shout echoing across the morning quiet. *"Ici! Ici!* I have got them here! I have caught both of them."

Not far distant there was an answering halloo. Presently, the sound of boots running.

Underbrush crackled; then a figure broke from the bushes beyond the beaver dam, skirted the pond, slid down the mossy bank and came striding up the beach. The man wore rubber boots, fisherman's togs, carried in his right hand a Colt automatic, in his left hand a small portable radio. Breathless from running, he paused, set down the radio and, smiling at Billy and the girl, removed from his face a pair of sun glasses.

The girl shrank against Billy in fear. "The thin one—"

Billy Dunbar said through set teeth, "Hello, Eland."

"Hello, Dunbar." Eland's expression was cordial. "I didn't think I'd see *you* again."

"I had an idea I might see you," Billy said. Blood was humming in his brain. All the woodsy remoteness, the Arcadian atmosphere had drained from the scene. The isolated cove, the pretty beach, the leafy solitude Billy saw as a trap.

Eland chuckled, "Full of ideas, aren't you? And in such nifty company, too." His grin went to the girl. "How're tricks, honey? You and my pal, Dunbar, off on a little side-rip? Swell place for a picnic, this."

Billy felt the girl shudder against him. Eland picked up the portable radio, advanced five paces, set the radio down and stood, boots apart, his features pleasant, automatic pistol resting casually on hip.

He said, fluttering his yellow eyelashes lazily, "You can take your hands down, girlie; you must be tired holding that curio up in the air. Suppose you just hand it over to me."

Faint strains of music impinged on Billy's consciousness. The portable radio was playing very softly. Muted violins. Brushing Eland's hip-boot, the switch must have clicked on. Thin melody in the sunshine added bizarre accompaniment to this melodrama. *Intermezzo* while Billy and the girl stood hands-up on a pebble beach under a grandfather elm, facing gun-muzzles that were ugly in early sunshine.

Eland urged gently, "Come on, beautiful. Let's have the toy."

WORDLESS, she let it fall from her lifted hand. The wooden figure made a light *thump* on dry pebbles. Stepping forward quickly, Eland stooped to pick it up. Billy fell on the man in unchained fury. Driving his fist into the back of Eland's neck, he crashed into Eland sidewise, flung him in a crazy, crab-like flounder to water's edge. Following through, Billy was on top of him, then under him, roweling with desperate knees, fingers locked on Eland's gun-wrist, straining to twist loose the gun.

Eland was squalling, "Don't shoot me! Don't shoot me!" to the monkey-faced midget who dodged crazily in and out, trying to aim at Billy while the girl clung wildly to the rifle barrel, fighting to drag the little wharf-rat to his knees. Billy butted his head under Eland's chin; the pistol exploded, blowing a hole in the beach. Smoke, sand and pebbles founted close to Billy's ear. Half stunned by the concussion, he rolled out from under, lashed a fist against Eland's nose, wrenched the automatic from Eland's grip and hurled the weapon out into the cove. Eland sprawled back on his knees, uttering a howl; Billy corkscrewed around in a gauze of gunsmoke, saw the blow coming, but couldn't dodge. *Whack!* The down-whipped rifle barrel, glancing off the side of his head, sent him across the pebbles like a scrabbling baby. Slowly he pushed himself to his feet. Beach, mossy bank and tree swam in drunken blur while he fumbled, butter-fingered, to draw his gun.

"Drop that! Drop it quick, damn you! I shoot!"

Billy's fingers obeyed against his will.

"Back to the tree! Hands up! Stand there!"

He stumbled backwards, missed the tree, grabbed it hastily, stood with shoulders sagging against the bark, arms droopily raised. Gradually his vision came into focus; he saw the girl in a huddle on the pebbles; the black-eyed gamin moving dog-legged toward the .32, aiming the rifle in a crouch; Eland standing at water's edge, stemming a nosebleed. Offside, the radio played *pianissimo*. The carved figure of the cameleer was half-imbedded in a mound of pebbles.

Eland called, "Good work, Ounce!" to the gamin. "Throw me the wise guy's gun."

Billy Dunbar's .32 in his fist, he walked at Billy slowly, all his counterfeit cordiality gone. His eyes were pale gleams under strands of taffy-colored hair; his lean face tight at the mouth; a black-red leakage of blood drying under his bruised left nostril.

He ordered, "Stand back, Ounce; keep your gun on the woman. I'll handle this son of a beagle!" Walking up to Billy, he drove the pistol-muzzle a hard, savage jab into Billy's solar plexus. Billy Dunbar cried out; doubled over, moaning.

"Straighten up!"

White-faced, blinded by tears, Billy Dunbar straightened.

"Tough, aren't you?" Eland's lips stretched thin.

Billy whispered, "Tough enough to know a crook when I see one."

Eland strained toward him. "Listen, wise guy, if you think I'm just some crook—"

"I know," Billy nodded. "You're a German agent, Eland. And a pretty slick customer with your Detroit slang and all."

"So!" Eland's pale eyes narrowed. His voice lowered, quietly in stealthier menace. "You are tough. You are wise. And a killer, too."

Billy said, blinking tears from his lashes, "I'm sorry I didn't knock all your iron teeth down your throat for you, Eland. Lousy Nazi snake-in-the-grass!" Crimson suffusion darkened the thin man's features. Certain he was going to pull the trigger, Billy was too sick from that pistol-punch to care.

But Eland, his flush fading, relaxed his trigger-finger; gave Billy a long scrutiny as if to ascertain how much he knew. "You talk big, wise guy," he said from one side of his mouth. "Act big, too. Five minutes from now you may not be talking or acting at all. That's up to you. If you want to help me, I'll give you a break."

"Help you how?"

"Talk. What're you, for instance, doing here with this girl?"

"Never mind the girl, Eland. She's nothing to do with me."

"Sure. You're a newspaper reporter from New York just up here taking a Saguenay cruise, is that it?"

"That's it."

"You won't be taking it much longer, pal. I see you're one of these wise guys who know a lot but won't open up. Okay. The girl will gab."

He backed to stand beside the girl's huddled figure. Talking down, his eyes on Billy Dunbar, "Look, sweetie, your game's up. We got you and we got your boy friend. We got the First Wise Man. We want the Second and Third."

She dropped her hands from her face; looked up through her hair. "I don't know where they are. I swear I don't."

"Don't swear, sweetie, it's not ladylike. Where are they?"

She moaned, "I tell you, I do not know."

Eland said flatly, "Look. The Boss wants them, and Ounce and I have been ordered to bring them in. Listen, gorgeous, we're not fooling. We won't hurt you— God forbid I'd ever have to hurt so lovely a creature—but we can make it pretty unpleasant for your boy friend."

She cast Billy Dunbar a look of terror. "*Non,* please—!"

"All right," Eland grinned. "You know the proposition, babe. It's either the wise guy or the Wise Men."

"What could you do to him!" the girl gasped.

"On a deserted beach like this? Miles from the nearest village? Lady, to a killer like him, little Ounce and I could do plenty. We tried to get rid of him in a nice way a couple of times; he keeps butting in. This time, I think, we'll hang him."

"Hang him?" the girl cried.

"Just the thing for a killer like him. Just the spot, with this tree and all. We can leave a little suicide note, too, explaining how he jumped off the ship and tried

to drown himself but didn't quite have the nerve and so on. Sure. We'll hang him high. Unless you want to tell—"

Frantic, the girl swept to her feet. "I will tell! I will tell! The Third Wise Man—it is in the church at Bagotville. *Oui—!*"

"Good. That's not too far. Where's the Second? The Third's no use without the Second, Addax says."

Color drained from the girl's cheekbones, lips, throat. She clenched her hands in despair. "The Second?" she said faintly. "Oh, you must believe me. I expected to find it nailed to this tree. It is not here. As God is my witness, m'sieur, I do not know where it is!"

Billy, watching, saw Eland's thin features harden into a facial snarl. He thought Eland was going to strike sideways at the girl. Then abruptly the snarl twisted into an expression more like fear. Music in the sunshine. Faint, yet distinct. A radio program concluding; signing off with those four baleful chords of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony—three shorts and a long—Morse code for the symbol V—musical impressionism for "Fate Is Knocking at My Door."

"Ounce!" Eland whipcracked the order. "Shut off that damned radio!"

And as the black-eyed runt obeyed, Eland snapped at the girl, "Now we've wasted enough time on this monkey-business. Where's the second image?"

"Before God, I know not!"

"All right, Ounce," Eland called to the little man. "Go up to our car and get the tow-rope." Sidewise to Billy, "Stand where you are, wise guy. The girl's just signed your death-warrant. You're goin' to hang!"

XII

THAT was unpleasant news for Billy Dunbar—as unpleasant as any he had yet encountered in the newspaper business. He'd covered a couple of lynchings in the South which had sickened him to the marrow, but covering his own on this secluded beach in Canada curdled his blood.

The conviction that Eland meant what he promised and would hang a man as soon as shoot him was not appeased by the fact that a girl would witness the execution, terror-eyed, and that the victim, disarmed, helpless, could do nothing about it. Billy's heart frosted to an ice-cube. The boys weren't kidding now. They'd tried to maim him, beat him up in Quebec, scare him off or sidetrack him. Up here on the Saguenay, throwing him off a ship to drown, they'd meant murder. A phrase of McAuliff's came uncomfortably to mind—"Canada's in a shooting war and her enemies are playing for keeps."

Billy said through his teeth, "You can't pull a stunt like this, Eland. I'm an American citizen—"

"Yeah? So am I," Eland's thin mouth smiled venomously. "An automobile salesman from Detroit. Vacationing in Canada for my health."

"Not for long, you won't. A dirty Nazi agent in a death-cell where you and your kind belong. The Canadians know about you. I tipped off the Mounties in Quebec."

Eland's features reflected momentary concern. Then he leered, "Like hell. They'd've searched the cruise ship leavin' Quebec if you had; besides, you wouldn't have tipped the Mounties, you'd have called the War Department. And lay off that Nazi talk, wise guy, or I'll slap you in the face with a bullet."

Billy stared dully into the muzzle of the .32. His lips and tongue felt dusty. Sunlight slanting hot over the easterly bluff burned into his eyes and made him blink.

"So you *were* on the cruise ship when she left Quebec," he remarked flatly. Talk was difficult, but standing against an elm tree with the pit gone from your stomach, your arms going numb and an anticipatory ache in your throat needed conversational diversion.

Eland grinned, "Like to know how, eh,

pal? Maybe there's a lot of things you'd like to know. You ain't got much time to puzzle them out. Ounce should be back any minute now."

Puzzle them out. The phrase gave Billy a nostalgic little pang, reminding him of the quiet veranda of New York Hospital, the snug wheelchair, the hours he'd spent champing at the bit over four-letter words across and five-letter words down. Maybe he'd been hasty about wheelchairs and cross-word puzzles. Too quick to come to Canada on a convalescent cruise.

"Eland," Bill said, "if you think you can string me up and wring any more information out of the girl, you can't. She's as unhappy as you are not to know the whereabouts of that wooden relic you seem to be after."

"That's right, pal. And she'll be unhappier when she sees you kicking at the end of your rope. Likely she'll have a nervous breakdown."

On her knees, her face buried in her elbows, the girl swayed. For the slow drag of minutes since Ounce had raced off on his foul errand, she had huddled there, soundlessly sobbing. Now she wept across an arm, "I do not know where it is. I don't know where it is. I swear!"

"See?" Eland shrugged. "She doesn't know where it is! So, wise guy, you're going to hang."

In a flash the girl swerved on her knees; threw herself bodily at Eland's legs. Billy, who'd been hoping she would make a break for it and run, started forward with a shout. Striking down ruthlessly, Eland beat at the girl's tousled hair with the pistol-barrel, and, as she crumpled down on the pebbles, turned and hit Billy, *swat!* between the eyes. The blow hurt like a bullet. Billy squatted back on his heels; sat stunned, weeping and mumbling, face in hands.

When Eland yelled at him he was too numb to stand up and take more. Presently he heard Eland say, "The girl and the wise guy started another revolution; I had to knock them out," and he knew the midget must be back from the car.

The little man's harsh voice: "Here's the tow-rope. Also I brought some heavy twine."

Eland's snarl, "Tie him up! Yeah, and proper!"

BILLY wrestled feebly as hands caught him from behind; out cold. Water dumped in his face brought him into leaping consciousness to find his wrists bound behind his back, ankles lashed together. He was propped with his back against the big tree. Eland, stooping, dashed a hatfull of water into his face, and a little way off, Ounce, the midget, was wringing a bandanna over the pale face of the girl.

"She is coming awake," the gamin creature called.

"Fine. The wise guy's awake, too." Stepping back, Eland picked up a coil of dark rope and took up position under an overhanging tree limb. Looking up, he tossed the rope and after several tries succeeded in snaking it over the shady limb. Billy Dunbar felt the hair rising on his scalp. Eland, nimble-fingered, was anchoring the rope to an upthrust root that sprawled at the elm's base like a rheumatic leg. Then, briskly, he reached for the dangling rope-end, and with workmanlike deftness fashioned a slip-noose.

When the noose was done, it swayed in suspension about five feet above ground. Eland tested the slide-knot; batted at the halter playfully.

"All set, Ounce. Help me hoist him into his collar. We'll take up slack with a couple of hitches under that tree-root. I'll write the suicide note after. Make it look like he climbed the tree himself with the rope around his neck and dropped himself off the limb. Let's go."

Dragged between his captors, Billy was hustled under the noose, supported upright by the little man while Eland fitted the halter over his neck. Greasy, the rope smelled of motor oil and gasoline. Billy

felt its harsh hemp bristles against his cheek. When Eland adjusted the slip-knot so that it snugged tightly under Billy's left ear, Ounce relaxed his clutch, allowing Billy's toes to touch the ground. The rope tautened murderously. Poised on tip-toe, chin askew, Billy sweat in a tension of suspense—like a marionette on a string, its toes just touching the stage.

Yes, there was stage and scenery. An apron of yellow pebbles kissed by the lisping eddies of a placid blue cove. Background of green underbrush, brown rocks, a great, overshadowing tree. Sunshine sprinkling down through foliage, and overhead a cobalt dome of sky. There were birds and things.

The scenery was good, but the actors, Billy felt, were lousy. Ounce, the grotesque midget, with his slum-boy face, overplayed as a Dead-End Kid. Eland was definitely ham. He might've been thespianing before a Hollywood camera, the way he stepped back sneering, dusting his hands, arranging his mug in a wolfish leer of satisfaction.

"Well, pal"—the lines reminded Billy of soap-opera heroics from the radio—"I guess you're all set to go. Stuck your neck out, didn't you? Had to be a wise guy. Or

did you come up here for a rest cure?" Chuckle, "Well, it's 'Rest in Peace' for you now."

Billy felt he should say something vindictive; found there was nothing he could say. This whole show was getting as idiotic as a college fraternity initiation. Now even the mahogany-haired girl—obviously too good-looking to be true—was overplaying some part. On her feet somehow, swaying, face like marble, one hand clutched to her hair and an unreality of terror dilating her eyes.

"Non, non!" her words came in faint screams. "Stop! I will tell. Anything you want to know!"

Eland rounded as she ran toward him. "Okay, lady. Is it the wise guy or the Wise Man?"

"The Wise Man!" she sobbed. "I will tell you where it is. Ah, *mon Dieu,* yes! The Second Wise Man!"

"Back!" Eland aimed the pistol. And as she halted, cringed two steps backward and stopped, "All right, cutie pie, where is it?"

"An old woman—a fortune-teller named Grandmère Ledoc—she knows where it is. Her cottage is on the road not far from Trois Bateaux. I was told in Tadoussac she had the relic in her possession. From her you can obtain the Second Wise Man."

"Fine," Eland's features brightened. "Trois Bateaux is between here and Bagotville. We can drive right over there and visit your Grandmère Ledoc. After the hanging."

"After the—" the girl threw a hand to her mouth. Stared.

Eland stood with bared teeth. "Listen, sweet. Even if I believed in your old granny—which I don't—I'd string up this Yankee tourist. He's too wise. Besides, he's a killer. He's due this execution, anyway. Now keep away from under this tree or he may kick you in the eye."

"Ham," Billy muttered.

No sense of reality to this at all. A moment ago, senses punch-drunk, he'd believed it. Visualized himself suspended on a rope, head canted to one side, like those gruesome victims of Nazi discipline pictured in *Photography Magazine.* Now, on tiptoe with a rope around his neck, this business had lost its actuality. Even when Eland ordered Ounce to hoist Billy off the ground and hold him aloft. Even when that freakish little creature—surprisingly possessed of a gorilla's strength—grasped Billy around the knees and lifted him bodily to mid-air. Even when, springing to the tree, Eland grabbed the rope's slack end and took up the slack by slapping deft hitches around the elm root.

Even when Eland shouted, "Drop him, Ounce!"

Even when the girl screamed.

Even when Ounce, smirking hideously up into Billy's face, spat, *"Bon voyage—"*

Nobody was going to hang a man on a beach under a shade tree in sunning morning. A dragon-fly lit on Billy Dunbar's nose—

Yawk!

The world swam out from under Billy Dunbar. Cove and beach and sky and elm-leaves spun in dizzy merry-go-round before his eyes. Faces and figures whirled below in soupy blur. He was bucking, twisting, swinging through space in trapeze-like arcs; there was a sound of sawing wood; blood roared through his brain; a red hot tourniquet was crushingly closing his windpipe. Redness flamed across his vision. His ears boomed. The sun came down and hit him in the face. The whole kaleidoscope turned violent crimson, then dead black. And then, somewhere out of blind midnight, there sounded a fearful series of explosions, a wild ripping, a tremendous crash.

Billy Dunbar fell four feet through a thousand years. There was a stunning jolt; his face walloped down into a smell of earth and leaves; something thumped him mightily across the shoulder-blades, and he seemed to sprawl for a long time under a thundering cannonade while dust, noise,

kindling wood, all of Canada crashed down.

Now, when he awoke, he was sitting upright in a forest of sticks, branches, twigs, dry elm leaves; foliage in his face, millions of ants crawling on his shirtsleeves, a smell like a lumberyard and a haze of light brown dust in the air. To his astonishment, when the haze cleared a little, he found himself blinking up into a pair of deep, wide, luminous gray eyes. Gradually a girl's face developed. A face as white as washed marble framed in a thicket of dark, mahogany hair.

"Bee-lee—"

He tried to answer; his larynx ached; he put hands to throat and memory came like a hammer-blow.

Shatter-pated, he stared at the girl leaning at him through the elm-branches. She clutched a knife in her hand—the ropes were off his wrists and ankles—gone from his neck!

"Are you badly hurt?" she was sobbing. "Bee-lee, Bee-lee! Are you injured?"

Dazedly Billy Dunbar clawed himself upright out of the shrubbery; swayed on his legs.

For a minute he couldn't see anything save the deeps of those luminous, water-gray eyes. Then he realized the sun was shining brilliantly, there was a blue cove nearby, somewhere an excited twitter of birds. He fought the words out of his agonized throat. "Wha—what happened?" He was standing knee-deep in a surf of leaves and twigs. "Wha—whuh—where—"

"Look!" she pointed.

Billy staggered around drunkenly and looked. On the beach not two yards away, Ounce, the little man, lay curled in a limp "S" like a guttersnipe asleep in the sun. Within kicking-distance sprawled Mr. Eland, face up, mouth a little open, eyes closed. He had met with an accident reminiscent of the one Billy Dunbar had suffered in the 1938 New England hurricane—a thick, rough-barked, tree-limb lay leg-wise across his thin stomach, pinning him to the ground.

Billy regarded this phenomenon, stupefied. Shaky-legged, he maneuvered an about-face to look at the tree. An ugly rip laid open the elm-trunk from main crotch to roots. Twenty feet above ground where it had joined the trunk, the limb had been shorn away as though hit by lightning. Streams of ants crawled like cascades of red pepper from the slash. Under its hide of mossy bark, the old elm was a shell of rotted punk.

"It broke off," the girl cried. "The big limb. *Mère de Dieu!* Your weight tore it loose as though it had been torn down by the hand of Saint Christopher the Protector."

Billy Dunbar didn't believe in guardian saints, but that limb breaking off to save his neck was something certainly close to a miracle. He heard the girl describing how Ounce, leaping to escape the timber-crash, had been sideswiped and knocked cold. Eland had been nailed as though by an African man-trap. Somehow Billy, swinging like a pendulum, had been thrown clear of the falling limb.

"I got the little man's knife," the girl said breathlessly. "I thought you were dead. I—I wonder if they are."

Billy, fumbling at a sore throat, rather hoped they were. He saw a twitch stir Ounce's curled frame; at the same time, heard a faint, sleepy moan from Eland.

Billy mumbled, "Evangeline, give me the knife."

"You're not going to—"

"I ought to. From ear to ear. I'm going to tie them up, that's all. Grab that rifle on the beach, there—quick!—the midget's coming to." His own blunted senses were sharpening. Spying his .32 pistol under a stack of twigs, he snatched up the weapon, reeled down the beach and tapped the butt down decisively on the midget's scurfy head. Similar treatment served to thoroughly anaesthetize Mr. Eland. It was then not difficult to extricate the thin man

from the arboreal wreckage—he was only lightly pinned—and more work with the knife, cutting lengths of hangman's rope, occupied only a moment.

Billy, not in a forgiving mood, wrenched the knots as tight as he could, binding his two erstwhile executioners hand and foot; leashing them together and then tethering them to the base of the elm. There was enough rope to allow them to work their way down the beach to water's edge should they get thirsty. Dirty gangsters! Billy hoped they'd get very thirsty and have a difficult time reaching the water. In fact, he hoped that, trussed together, they'd chew each other's heads off like the two De Medici cardinals who were hanged side by side in Florentine Italy.

"They're safe now," he panted to the girl. "We've got to find their car wherever it is—send the police back for them this afternoon."

His own throat was dry and burning; his head felt like a gas balloon that might at any moment detach itself and soar off; he stumbled downslope to the rowboat at water's edge—the craft that had brought him to this verge of nightmare—and then thrust his face and ears under the cool shallows.

Whoosh! That was better. A man doesn't survive the gallows very often. He wondered if his hair was white from the experience.

As he stood blowing bubbles, wiping water from his eyes, he heard the girl cry, "Bee-lee—"

She was standing at the foot of the shorn elm, looking up. "Bee-lee! Bee-lee! *Look!*"

He stumbled up to her side; gaped. Tacked to the tree-trunk, a dozen inches above the crotch where the limb had broken away—perhaps twenty feet above the ground, and where it had been formerly screened from view by the arching limb—was a little shrine-sized figure. A little carved-wood figure of a desert nomad holding an urn.

Billy felt like lying down beside Eland and Ounce.

"Not thirty hands above ground, but forty!" the girl whispered. "The Second Wise Man! Do you see it, Bee-lee?" Her eyes shone as in a light of mystery. "It was nailed there long ago. The tree grew!"

MAYBE the tree grew and maybe it didn't, and maybe that weather-beaten carving in the girl's hand would grow to mean something, and maybe it wouldn't, but Billy Dunbar wasn't letting any grass grow under his feet. His .32 was in its holster and Ounce's hunting rifle was in his hand, and he and Miss Evangeline were getting out of there.

They were toiling up the steep slope Ounce had ascended on his errand to fetch the rope, and the climb was no casual job. The footing was uncertain, and the hillside densely shrubbed with scrub pine, dogwood, thistle, blackberry, burdock and other nettlesome underbrush. Rising laboriously, the hill sloped upward to a fringe of blue-green spruce that had not seemed far-distant from the beach, but halfway up the ascent seemed as aerial as Pike's Peak.

Billy wore Eland's rubber boots. In departure he'd thought to appropriate them—it had necessitated untying and re-lashing the thin gangster's ankles—but there was satisfaction in knowing the ants would tickle the gunman's undressed feet. He grunted to a pause beside an outcropped boulder to look back and down at the cove. Rats! Their turn to hang when the Canadian authorities came back here for them. He couldn't help a silent, farewell curse for the pair of them. Two swell rattlesnakes. Then, listening, he chuckled. Undesirous of freighting himself with Eland's portable radio—the police would find it later—he had left it on the beach, out of reach, playing. Tuned to the Canadian Government station at Ottawa, it ought to amuse the boys with newscasts from Britain

and an hourly broadcast of those somber chords from Beethoven's Fifth.

"Bee-lee, we must press on," the girl urged, over the shoulder. "It must be well after breakfast time. If we hope to reach Bagotville before nine—"

Breakfast time! So that was the trouble with his stomach. He hadn't thought about it. Or any clock-time, for that matter. Time had stopped somehow down there on that secluded beach. Impossible to believe all that had occurred since landing there at daybreak, certainly no more than three hours ago. As for last night's events—the one-two from the ship—the midnight swim—the rescue and the row across the Saguenay—they seemed remote as harum-scarum episodes of his boyhood.

He shifted the rifle to left hand, and bent to the climb. They were following a sort of dim path that might have been left by the midget working his way through the brush or by a goat. After a night of Northern Lights and frost-fog, heat rained down. Sun began to burn Billy's bruised neck. Yellow butterflies flitted among the waist-high scrub. And pestiferous horseflies.

Working upward through thorn-berries, Billy panted, slapped, scratched his knuckles and swore. Harder climb than he'd expected, and surprisingly hard to keep up with the girl. In her flannel slacks, she scaled rock-croppings, jumped boulders and jogged uphill with extraordinary agility. Unused to exercise calling for anything harder on endurance than tennis, Billy Dunbar was pretty well fagged. But everything about the girl was surprising. The way she'd saved his life. Her conclusion to that treasure-story. The fact she had, too, been trailed by Eland. Not remarkable, now, that she should produce a pair of string-soled beach-shoes from her voluminous, white handbag, and lead him uphill in this scramble.

Then all at once she halted, tense. Like a deer, Billy thought, alarmed by something in the thickets above. She was wearing the Mackinaw salvaged from the hunter's cabin last night; as Billy caught up with her, she was hugging the two little wooden figures under her coat.

"What's the matter? See something?"

She clutched his sleeve. "*Non.* But we must be careful. The others, Bee-lee. There were four of them. A big man. And the fat man, Addax. The thin one mentioned his name! They may be around."

"I thought of that." Scanning the terrain on either side, the bluffs that enfolded the cove, the spruce woods above, Billy alertly gripped the rifle. "I don't think they are nearby, or Eland would've summoned them. But they may've left a guard to watch their car."

"I am frightened, Bee-lee. I admit it. How did those *voleurs* trail us to the cove so swiftly? With the Second Wise Man now in our possession we must take extreme care. We must hurry, hurry. And there is so little time."

Elbow to elbow, they moved on up through the brush. A car meant a road—Billy judged it ran somewhere beyond the crest of spruce—but, from the wilderness aspect of the country, Eland and the little gutter-rat from Quebec might have arrived on the scene by a magic carpet.

Eland had been on the cruise ship, and doubtless the midget with him, but where? How had they reached this shore and obtained a motor? By what guidance had they arrived at the cove simultaneously with the rowboat's foggy arrival? But seen by the light of day, this whole affair was foggy—the girl's part in it—the Wise Men business. Concentrating on possible ambush, Billy had to leave such puzzles out of mind. His brain was in no condition for riddle-solving. Somewhere there was a car and a road; first thing to do was to reach a village and inform the police that two gunmen were in need of immediate arrest on that beach.

Energized by this urgency, he drove himself up to the ridge on legs that wanted to drop him to the ground. Putting him-

self ahead of the girl, he moved in a half crouch, grip tense on the rifle—a pump-gun of foreign manufacture—squinting into woodsy shadows. They entered the spruce furtively. The blue-green shade was cool after the hot hill-climb; there was a bracing fragrance of evergreen; a refreshing breeze stirred the boughs. Somewhere started the sharp rat-tat-tat of a woodpecker on his morning's carpentry work.

"Voila!" the girl breathed out. "There is the car."

A rattletrap Ford truck parked, surprisingly, in a thicket at the left. No evidence of a sentinel watcher. Breaking from the thicket, Billy discovered the road—a narrow highway of shaved dirt bending off through the cool trees.

He discovered also how Eland and his evil little golem had sighted the rowboat down in the cove. The dirt road traveled in parallel circuit along the bluff hemming the cove; through gaps in the spruce one viewed a panorama of the cove, the entering gorge and the broad canyon of the Saguenay beyond. In this vista of bluffs, sky and water, not a sign of human intrusion was visible. A boat down there in the cove would be as conspicuous as a fly moving across an oil painting.

On the other hand, the pebble beach was screened from view by intervening woods-clumps and trees. "They must've spotted us from here," Billy pointed. "They couldn't see where we beached the boat, so they separated and went down the ridge on either flank. Where," turning to the truck, "did they pick up this fliver, and where does this road go to?"

Both questions were answered by the jelopy.

Block lettering freshly painted on the battered sidings.

Daman & Sapajou
Garage
Trois Bateaux

"Trois Bateaux!" the girl exclaimed. "That is a little fishing village not far from here—perhaps twenty or thirty miles—between here and Bagotville. There are only a few cottages and a store. I do not recall a garage."

Billy Dunbar read the name aloud, "Daman and Sapajou. We'll hop this puddle-jumper back to them. Those Nazi rats probably stole it."

"And we must take a car on to Bagotville," the girl said breathlessly. "Do not forget, Bee-lee. The cruise ship arrives there this morning. The tourists will be flocking ashore. We must reach the old church at Bagotville ahead of them. All will be lost if we do not find the Third Wise Man."

THE Third Wise Man! Billy Dunbar told himself that just as everything became fairly normal and he found himself doing something down-to-earth and rational—such as racing a Ford truck down a back-road in French Canada—the atmosphere vapored off into fantasy again.

He could cope with something he could get his hands on, like the wheel of a car. There was no mystery to a Ford. This particular edition, dating back to 1928, was a small, open job of the type employed by farmers to cart potatoes, by ice men to carry ice, by Daman & Sapajou of Trois Bateaux as a repair car. Mud spattered, homely, its fenders dented by innumerable collisions, its four-cylinder engine a tinker's masterpiece and its age a tribute to French-Canadian thrift, it was none the less a comprehensible machine.

Bounding around on its back deck were plain, every-day objects like a used tire, a box of mechanic's tools, a road-jack, a length of chain. Rattling about in the driver's cab were nuts, bolts, somebody's briar pipe. Billy Dunbar could understand such objects. He could even make head-and-tail out of the green canvas zipper-bag he'd found in the bag. A clip of .38 automatic bullets. A pack of cards. A 9-mm. Luger. A clean pink-striped shirt

you wouldn't wear to a dog fight. A packet of obscene postal-cards.

Even the grimy little book found in Eland's kit—a much-thumbed pocket dictionary—was not, as it had seemed at first glance, too unreasonable.

"Sure," Billy showed it to the girl, "the lout was perfecting his English. That proves he was born a German. Probably came over to the States right after the Armistice. A linguist, like many of 'em are. Darned clever with all his American slang, too."

You could explain commonplace objects —For trucks, Luger pistols, pocket dictionaries—they belonged to your workaday pattern.

But antiques—carved pieces of wood dating back three centuries — relics which would reveal a hidden treasure, and one supposedly endowed with some kind of supernatural power!—that was too much for Billy Dunbar.

Yet the girl was at his side in this bumping truck, and those two wooden figures were clutched under her coat. What was more, so earthy a snake as Phil Eland had been after them. Billy shook his head to himself in bewilderment as he drove. Eland wasn't the type to waste his time chasing rainbows. If all the straws in the wind meant anything, he should have been up here in French Canada on other, more devious enterprises. Maybe, in her mysterious, feminine way, the girl did have something.

"Look out!" the girl jarred against him. "Bee-lee—"

He saw the shadow leaping across the road; swerved the truck just in time to avoid the fleeing doe. That was something, too. A spotted deer. This country was as full of wildlife as a sportsman's Paradise. Vernal and unspoiled. Perhaps more suited to folklore and ancestral legend than to the cunning machinations of realistic Nazis. In a land of forested hills and wide, blue waterways Billy could understand how the *habitants,* close to nature, might believe in ghostly guardsmen and treasure trove.

The truck raced on, swaying on the curves, jouncing, trailing a plume of biscuit-colored dust and shattering the woodland stillness with its racket. Billy, after a preoccupied silence, asked, "How much farther do you think it is to this village?"

"I do not know. I do not recall this road."

"You know," glancing sideways, "this part of Canada, then?"

"*Mais oui.* Often I drove up here from Montreal to buy antiques. There is a main highway, rather bad, on this side of the Saguenay. This dirt road must be new. Perhaps it leads to a training camp, or perhaps it was built by Nazi prisoners."

"Nazi prisoners?"

The girl explained, "In this district are some internment camps. Prisoners of war. They can work if they care to. Our government pays them. There is a large camp, I believe, somewhere beyond Chicoutimi."

Billy Dunbar didn't give a hang if they were paid. He couldn't recall hearing of such lenience on Hitler's part; for his own part he knew two Nazi prisoners who were going to get something tougher than pick-and-shovel work. And the girl's mention of Chicoutimi Prison Camp was another reminder of his own situation in this affair. He'd been sent up here by McAuliff to chase a rumor concerning Nazi activities in this neck of the woods. No doubt about the Nazis being active in the neighborhood, but he had yet to uncover how, when and where. As for who, he knew Eland was one of a number, the little guttersnipe called Ounce was another, but there were more—where and who?

Into these somber questions, the girl projected another. "Bee-lee, you say that thin man and the little one are Nazi agents. If so, the big man whom I saw them with in Montreal, and the fat man, Addax, must also be Nazis." She shivered. "Do you suppose the French refugee who brought me the First Wise Man

from Paris was trailed by members of the Gestapo?"

"It begins to look as if we were all being trailed by members of the Gestapo."

"Down there on the beach the little man said you had met before."

"On that promenade overlooking the St. Lawrence at Quebec. He was posing as a street-guide—a ragamuffin in britches."

He could feel her gray eyes searching his profile. She asked directly, "Bee-lee, why are they after you?"

He realized he hadn't told her anything of himself; wondered how much, if any, he ought to tell. He owed her his present existence, a debt he felt himself unable to repay, and she had confided in him.

"Evangeline," he said frankly, inwardly feeling somewhat of a heel, "I came up here on this Saguenay cruise to recover from an operation. I'm a newspaper man —wrote some anti-Nazi stuff last winter in New York. Either these rats have mistaken me for somebody else on their revenge-list, or they're trying to give me the business for those news articles." He patted her knee. "Don't worry about me, dear lady."

"But I do worry. I do. They tried to kill you—almost—almost hanged you. Now they will surely try to locate me, knowing what they do. It is not safe for you to be with me."

HE OUGHT to tell her it wasn't safe for her, the other way around. As soon as they reached this village he'd see she had police protection. "Forget those rats. They are going to be rounded up," he promised her.

She cried, "But who are they? How many? Where is this Addax, now? A terrible man, Bee-lee. Eyes, little eyes like a sulky pig's. Did you comprehend what that thin man was going to do with you? Hang you and leave a fake suicide note! Which convinces me it was this gang who slew the refugee antiquarian in Montreal, leaving a suicidal note—the same method so often employed by the Nazis on their victims in Europe."

Anger scorched Billy Dunbar's cheekbones. A day would come when Hitler's assassins learned the world wouldn't stand for such gangsterism. Terrorism had its own reward.

He wondered if McAuliff's "little bird" reported "found dead on 85th Street" had been murdered by this same crowd. He wished McAuliff had told him more about this tipster. Likely the Boss' last telegram had told more—the telegram so savagely snatched away by gloved fingers before he'd had time to finish reading it. Was Eland the owner of that gloved hand? Billy remembered. Perhaps they'd been on Pal Phil's person. He regretted he hadn't searched the lizard more thoroughly.

What baffled Billy was the tie-up between these hoods hounding the girl and the *saboteurs* plotting a Luftwaffe underground out of Canada. And all that highjinx stuff in Quebec. Was there a connection, or were they merely birds of a feather, vultures out of the same roost? For instance, the cable-car brigand who'd tried to stab him —Monsieur Tenrec? Billy scowled over the wheel. Always that name tugged some string in his mind, made him feel there was something he ought to remember.

"Bee-lee, there's the village."

He saw it. The dirt road right-angled abruptly out of the woods, S-curved down into a shady valley. At valley's end, a clutter of cottage roofs, a church spire, an outlook across the blue expanses of the Saguenay. At the bottom of the S, the dirt road joined a macadam pike. Billy skidded the dusty truck on the turn; raced along the main thoroughfare.

Countryside dozed in the sun. Traffic created an atmosphere of rural security and peace. On a graded curve they passed a billboard advertising Players Cigarettes. Draft horses hauling a lazy hay-wagon. A couple of jogging Fords. Boys on precarious bicycles. A dog-cart laden with shiny

milk cans. Tourist Canada, again. A road sign in French advised them they were entering Trois Bateaux.

Billy slowed across a whitewashed stone bridge, suddenly aware that he'd been racing the truck like panic. No hurry, now. Alongside the macadam there were telegraph poles. Smoke drifted up calmly from cottage chimneys ahead. A gas station—red tanks and Crown Petrol. Cars and farm wagons lined up along a steep curb. A priest in shovel hat teetered by on a bicycle, his face uplifted in abstract thought. A general store—*P. Bonhomme et Fils—Viandes, Vegetables, Tabac.*

XIII

NERVES relaxed in Billy Dunbar like a loosening of mandolin strings. The let-down was like a sudden transition from radio melodrama to the *Old Folks At Home* on country fiddles. As the truck ambled under maple trees, foliage just turning, and Billy smelled wood smoke, flower gardens and a whiff of fish, he slumped in aching fatigue.

He hadn't realized his head was throbbing, his neck twinging like neuritis, his jaw swelling a little, one shoulder as sore as lumbago and his back groaning as though he'd thrown out his sacro-illiac. He'd taken some pretty stiff punishment in the last twenty-four hours.

"And I look like hell," he noted. His bruised jaw shading blueish, face smeared, chin sprouting bristles, hair in a rumpus —the picture in the windshield mirror looked like "Wanted—Dead or Alive." A cornfield scarecrow would have disdained to wear his clothes. No wonder several of the villagers turned their heads to stare.

"We'll find this garage," Billy told his companion, "then I'm going back to that gas station and clean up. How do you feel?"

"Fine. I must hire a car at once and go on to Bagotville."

She could take it, Billy thought. And she didn't look bad, either. Her slacks a little dreary, but the Mackinaw looked cute—she'd scrubbed her face before leaving the beach. He couldn't help but admire how a dab of lipstick and a couple of hand-fluffs to the hair could restore a woman to the photographing point.

He marveled, "Didn't that scum hurt you when he struck you that time?" and gripped the wheel savagely at the memory.

"A little," she confessed. "But fortunately my hair—"

It was wonderful, that mahogany-colored hair. Billy admitted to himself he was never going to forget it. "The rat will pay for that blow, my dear lady. Take it from me! This repair garage will have a telephone and then—"

She clutched his arm. "Oh, please don't mention my name in this just yet. They'll want me as witness, and," her voice quivered in anxiety, "do not forget the mission I am on. I must go on with it, Bee-lee. Every minute now is counting. I must go on!"

"Sure, and I'm going with you. If you want to go to Bagotville, it's Bagotville for Dunbar." He had his own reasons for catching up with the cruise crowd, anyway.

HE BRAKED the truck on a downgrade between high curbstones, his eye seeking Daman and Sapajou's Garage. They passed a pink-walled warehouse and glimpsed a long, concrete quay. Fishing boats, a yawl, a small schooner raised masts in the sunshine. Dogs trotted along the quay. Men in lumberjack shirts were busy with steel hand-hooks unloading logs from a barge. Over the quay floated the red, white and blue of the Union Jack.

Daman & Sapajou—Garage—Gazoline, Huile, Mechaniques.

"Here's the place," Billy slowed in approach, steering off the macadam across an entryway of gravel. He pulled up before an orange gasoline pump. The garage was

a new building by the look of the white-washed brick. Typical village repair station. An Ontario car, a new sedan, was parked at the left over an oil pit. The garage entry was deserted. Somewhere at the back a hammer was pounding iron. A clock over the entry stood at eight minutes to nine.

"Eight to nine!" the girl drew an alarmed breath. "It is at least twenty miles to Bagotville. Bee-lee, the cruise ship will be ahead of us. I must get to that church—"

He squeezed her hand reassuringly. "You'll get there. I'm just running in here to telephone. Hey!" he worked the horn. "Service!" He jumped down from the driver's seat; started for the garage-entry. A man in oil-stained dungarees darted out of a smaller door marked, "Office." At sight of Billy he rooted to a standstill, uttered an ejaculation, stared at the dust-coated truck.

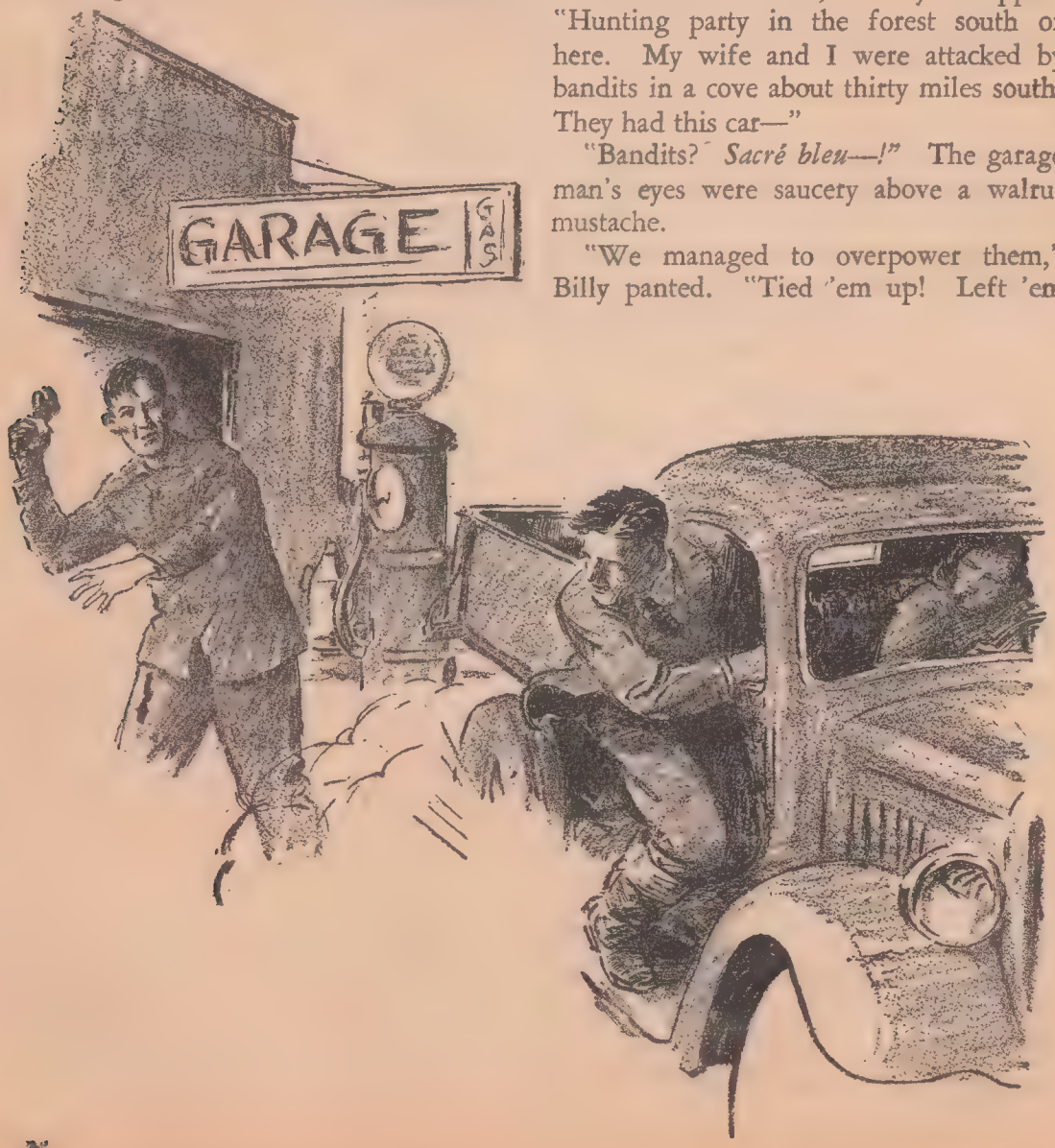
"I know, I know!" Billy barked at his obvious consternation. "It was stolen from your garage last night, wasn't it? Or did you rent it to some—"

"Rent? Stolen? Where did you get it? Who are you, M'sieur?"

"American tourist," Billy snapped. "Hunting party in the forest south of here. My wife and I were attacked by bandits in a cove about thirty miles south. They had this car—"

"Bandits? *Sacré bleu—!*" The garage man's eyes were saucery above a walrus mustache.

"We managed to overpower them," Billy panted. "Tied 'em up! Left 'em



fastened to a tree on this beach. I want to phone the police—"

"Police," the saucer eyes stared. Billy felt as if he were some sort of unbelievable phantom. In the interim a child in rompers toddled out of the garage to peer at him, thumb in mouth. A black and white dog of no registerable ancestry raced on a fast slant around the corner of the building to rear up and bark.

"I'm in a hurry, man! Your telephone?"

"Ah," the garage man came to life. "I will summon the police at once. *Oui,* it is our truck and it was stolen. Your name, M'sieur?"

"Never mind that. Just show me the pho—"

BUT the garage man was already running. Over his shoulder he called, "Wait there, M'sieur. You are not familiar with our rural call-numbers." Cupping his hands, he shrilled toward the garage's dim interior, "Sapajou! Sapajou! Our truck is back. Come out and talk to the American who returned it. *Vite!"*

In his haste, he stumbled across the office doorstep, left the door ajar. Billy heard him grinding the crank of an old-fashioned country telephone. Footsteps were hurrying from the garage's rear. A lank individual, his jumper splotched with black grease, came blinking out of recessed shadows, stood staring at Billy, monkey-wrench dangling in long-wristed hand. Bony face, eyes blank under a forelock of gray hair, he looked to Billy like a surprised horse.

A blur of French poured from the door at the side. The native dialect of French Canada. Billy heard, "Police! Police!" and *"tout suite!"* and *"aux Trois Bateaux —mait'nant"* but he didn't get the rest of it. Then, as he was on the point of going to the telephone himself, he heard a sharp, startled cry from the girl. He faced about toward the truck; was astonished by a rasp from the starter, an explosive roar from the engine. The girl was working the gears behind the wheel. She leaned out, beckoning frantically.

"Bee-lee, Bee-lee, quick! Come!"

"What—"

"The garage man! Jump on, Bee-lee! He is calling the police to arrest *you!"*

"Arrest me—" Billy, turning his head, moved only in time. Monkey-wrench aloft, the horse-faced man from the garage-entry was rushing him, crazy-eyed.

Without chance to think, Billy jumped on. Roaring a cloud of blue oil-smoke, the truck was away like a fast freight. Gravel slashed under the fenders. The horn *waahed.* Billy, clinging crazily to the running-step, looked around just in the nick to duck his head. Gunned from the gaunt mechanic's hand, the monkey-wrench whistled like a cannon shell past his ear, skimmed into the cab and smashed out the right-hand half of the windshield.

Swinging to the seat beside the girl, in a shower of glass, Billy Dunbar was too dumbfounded not to swear. Dizzily the truck took a skiddy turn, flopped back on all four wheels, roared past a prancing rig, scared hell out of an old farmer on a bicycle, and highballed at fifty up the straightaway of macadam. Fixed to the wheel, the girl's hands looked tense, white-knuckled.

Billy blurted, "Did they think *I'd* stolen this blasted rattletrap?"

The girl said, her eyes on the straightaway, *"Non,* Bee-lee, not the truck. That garage man was crying into the telephone that you were the man the police were looking for. The man from the cruise boat, the American wanted by the Quebec authorities for murder!"

XIV

"BEE-LEE," she asked after a strained pause in which he sat flabber-faced and flabbergasted, *"did* you murder anybody in Quebec?"

"Murder anybody in Quebec? My Godfrey! A cutthroat with a dagger and a big

blacksmith of a guy, calling himself Cecil, tried to murder *me!"*

"Cecil?" her voice high-keyed above the engine-roar. "Cecil? A big brute of a man called Cecil?"

"Why, yes!" Quebec seemed so long ago he could hardly recall that hotel-room fiasco. "A boozy lummox with fifty-pound shoulders and a Gay Nineties mustache."

The girl cried, "Then it was he. The big man of the quartet who trailed me from Montreal." Flashing Billy a frightened side glance, "Why did he try to kill you?"

Billy related an abbreviated version of his visit to the *Petit Marmot;* how he had escorted a lady in distress to her lodgings; the climax with the ineffible Cecil. He didn't think it necessary to go into details about Eyra the Fan Dancer.

"Mon Dieu!" the girl's lips trembled. "It was a trap for you. Those who trail me must also be trailing you. Is it not evident? The thin man makes friends with you on the ship. The little one called Ounce guides you to the dance dive. You are led to Cecil—I remember Addax calling him that when they visited my antique shop. But," braking the truck on a fast left-turn, "I do not understand this about the police wanting you, Bee-lee."

"That's what the garage man yelled in the phone? I was the American the police wanted?"

"For murder, *oui!* I heard him describing you. More. The cruise ship made dock at Trois Bateaux at four o'clock this morning. Several ship's officers including Captain Grenfell hurried ashore to telephone. Of course the ship's arrival awoke the whole village, for cruise ships do not stop there."

"The S.S. *Dominion?* Are you sure?"

"So the garage man was repeating over the telephone. It seems the ship was advised by wireless to arrest you. The officers went to your stateroom and found you missing. They came ashore to send out a river-boat to look for you."

And those ship's officers weren't the only ones who'd come ashore. Eland and the midget must have landed. Stolen into the village and swiped the repair truck. Set out to look for him and the girl, on their own. But—Billy pulled a sleeve across his forehead—what was this murder angle? Another gag to do away with him? The Quebec authorities sending out an alarm!

"Damn!" he exhaled on a thought. Eland had leered, "A killer, aren't you?" Used the word a couple of times, back there on the beach. Could it be these Nazi mongrels were trying to frame him, boggle him up with the Canadian authorities? Sure! So the police would hold him. Lock him up—maybe shoot him on sight if he dashed into some police station to tell his tale.

He thought, "And what tale have I got to tell?" Against Eland and the midget he could swear out warrants, but what proof they were Nazis? A Third Degree might sweat them—Eland looked the type to yip his head off under pressure—but the process might take several days. Meantime the big game might take cover, and while the police fumbled the ball, things might happen at Chicoutimi. And all this time, the cruise liner was on its merry way. Great Jerusalem! If he did anything, right now, he'd by all means have to avoid a meeting with the police.

"Listen," he faced the girl. "This is another trap. You've got to take my word for it—I'm no escaping criminal."

She nodded fiercely, "Do you think I would be driving you off like this if I believed so? *Dieu!* The police are such idiots. So I dared not go to them for protection with my story of the Three Wise Men. At me they would have laughed, then written notes, studied documents, telephoned the Ottawa Government to provide a party of investigators. All, in the delay, might be lost. I must reach that treasure's hiding place, Bee-lee!"

That! He kept forgetting that little fan-

tasy. Now he noticed the two wooden images snugged like precious dolls in the girl's lap. Dark flame, her hair streamed back from her forehead; in profile her face was a pale silhouette of determination.

"*Alors,* it is good luck for me that the ship put in at Trois Bateaux," she observed. "The delay may allow us to beat her to Bagotville." Pressing the horn, she shot the truck expertly between two jaywalking cows. "Once we have the Third Wise Man, we have won. Until nightfall we can hide in the woods or in some barn while I decipher the instructions inscribed on the Second."

Billy nodded, head bent to light a cigarette. Time enough to worry about Wise Men when he got a little wiser about his own situation.

"Only I am afraid," the girl was saying. "The two on that beach cannot harm us now, but there is still that big man and the fat one—Addax."

Yes, Billy reflected, face bowed over cupped hands, Eland and Master Ounce, unless chance-found by some fishermen, might remain there on the beach for some little time.

No risking a stop now to inform the law of their whereabouts. He had to get in touch with the ship's captain somehow, and find out about this wanted-for-murder fandango.

Wind whistled through the breach that flung monkey-wrench had made in the windshield, and he couldn't start a match, and while engaged in this endeavor he heard the girl gasp. "Keep your face covered, Bee-lee! *Spotteur!*"

Glancing up, he saw they were racing up a long, woods-shadowed hill. Coming at them over the crest, a motorcycle cop. An onrushing siren-wail, as the officer roared down on them, goggles low over the handlebars, highballing hell-for-leather.

Automatically the girl slowed the truck. Billy ducked his face, firing the cigarette. In a wind-gust the cycle officer screamed by, the siren-echo fading off downhill.

"Whew!" Billy peered around. "That copper's traveling."

"To Trois Bateaux," the girl nodded. "Doubtless in answer to that call from the garage. I do not think he noticed us in his hurry. He must have been sent from Bagotville."

"Then he'll be coming back. After this truck."

"I know. We cannot drive into the town in broad daylight. Bee-lee," she appealed, "what shall we do?"

"How far is Bagotville from here, Evangeline?"

"We just passed a sign. Eleven miles."

"All right, we'll speed as far as we can. Barring any more of your *spotteurs,* we ought to get within sight of the town. Then we've got to ditch this truck somewhere and run for it. I'd better take the wheel."

"*Non,*" she spurred the gas-pedal. "I can drive."

She could. The road was clear of traffic, and the truck made soup out of passing fences and telegraph poles. Farmland and woods. A hay field. More woods. Worn tires screeched on downgrade curves; the fenders shook, agued; the back deck swayed; steam poured from the bubbling radiator cap. Billy clung to the seat, trying to think, not succeeding. Four miles of steeple-topped pine forest; then the road hogsbacked along a ridge and the Saguenay, which they had lost at Trois Bateaux, swept into majestic view. Northward, above a fringe of trees, dark smoke smudged the water-clear sky. Billy Dunbar glimpsed the tips of white masts; heard an echoing, steam-throated *whoom!*

The girl cried, "The cruise boat! Just entering the harbor! The town is not a mile."

"All right," Billy touched her arm. "Ditch it the first likely place. Look—that road into the woods. We can duck the truck in there!"

She had already spied it—a cart-track forking off into a stand of hemlock and

taller pine. Bounding the truck off the macadam shoulder, she steered along the weedy ruts into the timber-patch and where the cart-track was screened from the highroad, cut the motor. Billy watched her button the wooden relics under her Mackinaw, holding them secure by a tug on the belt. He tried to give his necktie some semblance of smoothness; finger-combed his hair; saw that the .32 holster was out of sight under his unbuttoned vest.

"We can't take the rifle," he tossed it into pathside brush, "but I've got enough artillery on me to arm the Belgians. If the police catch me with this stuff of Eland's they'll certainly arrest me for murder."

"They must not see you, Bee-lee. They must not see either of us."

"You're going into the town?

"Around it," she beckoned. "It is only a little place. The church is near the outskirts. From the *curé* we can obtain food, I am certain, and sanctuary. I know the way," she was moving off through the pine scrub. "Come."

AS IN so many villages of French Canada, the church was the most imposing edifice in the town. Billy Dunbar saw the spire, and sensed its influence, long before he could make out the pattern of the town. Lifted against a wedge of creamy white cloud, the edifice rose above the village trees.

With the girl, he was skirting a broad, downhill meadow which, kneedeep in grass and clover, sloped toward the bay of the Saguenay.

They were scouting along behind a hedge of sumac, furtively avoiding the open pasture. Contented cows were grazing along a lower stone wall and there was a herd of black-faced sheep tended by a barefoot boy and a romping collie dog.

"Careful, Bee-lee," the girl whispered as he stumbled over a soggy pothole, "the dog must not see us."

They negotiated the pasture, entered a grove of maples, emerged on the edge of a cornfield bounded by a singsong little brook. Here the girl signaled a halt and calmly, with feminine handicraft, produced a comb from her white leather bag and proceeded to straighten Billy's hair and launder his face. He grinned, wincing as the comb gingered across an abrasion in his scalp, and quickly solicitous, the girl murmured, "Ah, *mon pauvre!*" and fumbled a tube of something from her bag, tenderly applying the medicament.

"I use it for mosquito bites. Does the sting feel better?"

"Jim dandy." His head ached like the devil, but he could stand a lot of this treatment from so intriguing a nurse. She smoothed his tie, buttoned a button on his shirt, tidied his vest and stood back and said, *"Alors."*

He grinned, possessed of a sudden, crackpot impulse to seize and kiss her. He canceled the impulse.

"We will continue your pose as tourists," the girl said. "We have been on a fishing expedition. You hit a tree with your car several miles out of town—a slight accident. *Voila,* we are not familiar with Bagotville so we have stopped at the parish priest's for his kindly advice. We are man and wife—agreeable?"

"Very agreeable."

"Leave the conversation to me. The *curé* will speak French. You are a Canadian from Vancouver and do not understand the language. Thus you will not need to answer questions. Understood?"

"Understood."

"A mention that we have not had breakfast, and the good Father will be certain to invite us to table."

"I could do with a snack," Billy tightened his belt, smiling.

"Meanwhile we will visit the chapel. I do not know where the—the Wise Man will be, Bee-lee. Perhaps in a little shrine. A kneeling figure with eyes uplifted, you comprehend. That is what we must look for."

He nodded.

"Undoubtedly a police alarm is out for you, but the officers will never think to look for you in the church. So!" She drew a breath. She said gravely, "I do not like to do this, Bee-lee. I am not religious —my father was part Scotch, although mostly French, and I have trained for hospital work. But to take a relic from a shrine, I do not like. Yet the Cause is most worthy. I will try to return the relic afterwards. *Le bon Dieu* will understand."

"I'm sure of that," Billy agreed, mentally adding, however, that the wisdom of the Almighty was by no means shared by such humble mortals as himself, for concerning the object in view he had no understanding whatsoever.

HAD he ever, he asked himself as he followed the girl through the corn, set out on an expedition as fantastic as this one? To enter a village dangerously policed, visit the local church and rifle a relic from a shrine—a relic reputed by legend to be able to point out a legendary gold-hoard by its eyes! By its eyes! That was the part which stumped Billy. He could fathom, even believe in directional inscriptions carved on a wooden image. He could even, when this girl told the story, believe in hidden treasure. But this matter of the Third Wise Man—

"Down!" the girl breathed. "There is someone in the corn ahead."

Only a straw hat and ragtag coat perched on a stick.

She gave a little breathless laugh as she saw; and they scuttled on. The sun was hot, and the corn-stalks rustled crisply. Several black crows sailed up, cawing. They were three quarters way across the field when the girl crouched down, "Listen!" Some distance to the right the macadam road stretched villageward; a motorcycle-siren wailed up from the south, screamed along the road and faded in the direction of Bagotville.

"Tonnere! The *spotteur* is back. Oh, Bee-lee!"

He whispered, "Fella didn't spot our truck, apparently. We haven't been tracked."

A long muffled *whoom* came echoing from the Saguenay shoreline.

The girl gasped, "The cruise boat is in. I see the smoke at the waterfront." She reached around to take his hand. "We must run now. Run!"

They raced along a corn-row, Billy Dunbar sweating in heavy rubber boots, burdened hamperously by Eland's canvas zipper-bag. Out of the corn, behind a hillside billboard, they halted for breath. The macadam road was within a stone's throw, entering the village through a file of stately chestnuts. A couple of cars hummed along the road.

Running swiftly, the girl led way along the rear-side of the low hill; they skirted a thinly wooded pine-grove, traversed a field of golden rod which made Billy sneeze, and came to a wagon-road which flanked past a lumber-yard. Cottages, shady village street, an open square and a side-view of the church were directly beyond. Billy judged they had circumvented the Main Street section and the waterside quarter of the town and were entering the outskirts from the back.

It was but a short walk to the church, and they assayed it nervously, controlling their approach to a saunter. Mid-morning, the village seemed quiet; save for two or three old ladies fussing over cottage gardens, the street to the church was deserted. One old lady in sunbonnet nodded to them, *"B'jour, M'sieur et Madame."* A letter carrier rounded a corner and politely touched his cap. *"B'jour."* A white cat sitting on the curbstone looked at them.

The girl whispered, "Most of the villagers will be down at the landing to watch the tourists come ashore from the boat."

He wondered where the police station was.

(*Part III in the Next* SHORT STORIES)

Curioddities By Weill

TEMPLES OF **INDIA** ARE STOREHOUSES OF **WEALTH.** MOST OF THEM HAVE AT LEAST *SEVERAL HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS WORTH OF* **GOLD** *AND* **GEMS,** *PRESENTS THAT WERE GIVEN BY DEVOTEES IN PAST GENERATIONS*

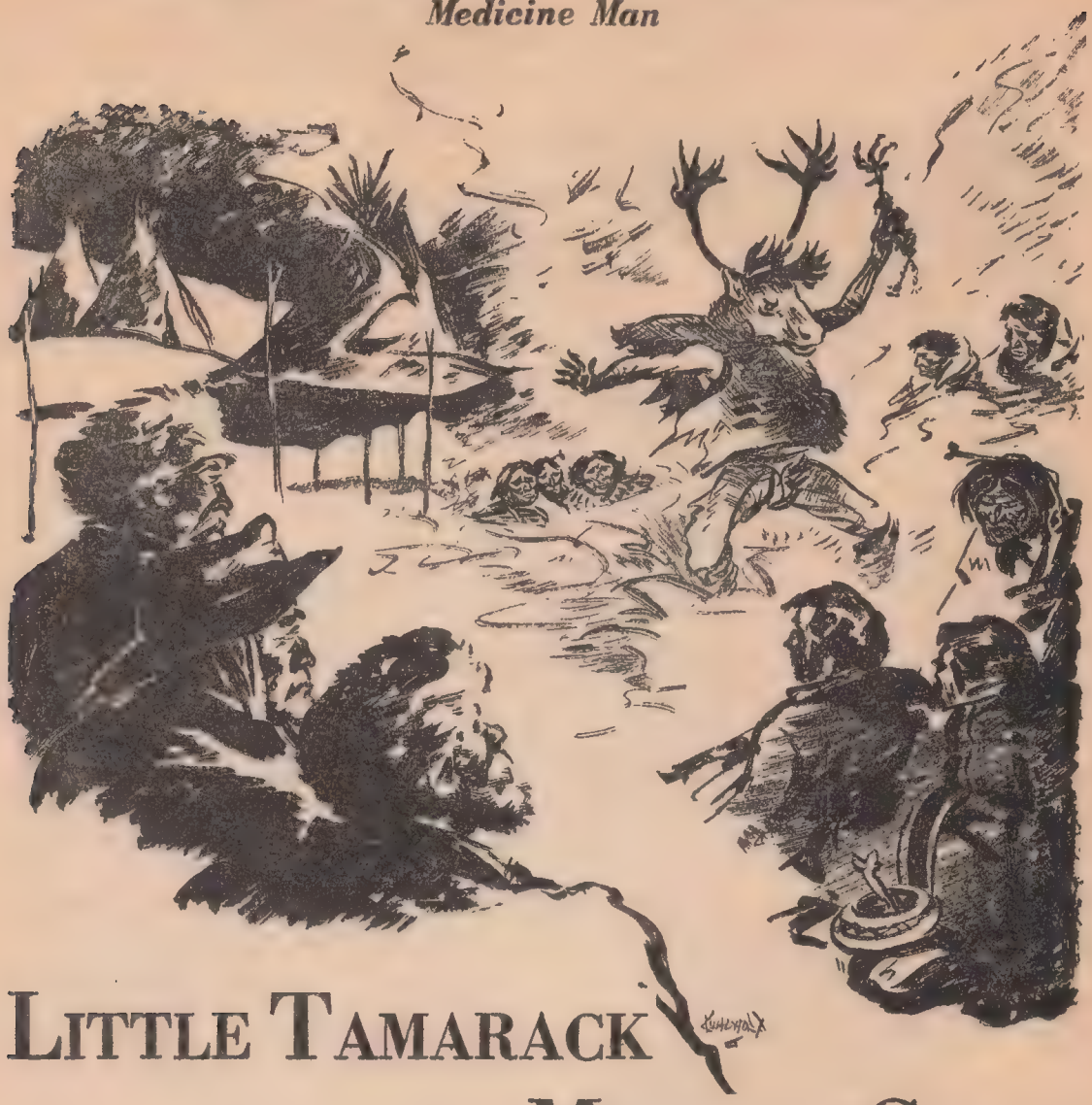
BATHING WAS MADE ***UNLAWFUL*** IN BOSTON IN **1845** ***UNLESS PRESCRIBED BY A PHYSICIAN*** TO-DAY THE NUMBER OF BATH-TUBS IN THE UNITED STATES IS **18,500,000**— *NINETY-FIVE PER CENT OF ALL THOSE IN THE WORLD*

CONTRARY TO POPULAR BELIEF, *THE* **AGE** *OF A RATTLESNAKE* **CANNOT** *BE DETERMINED BY THE NUMBER OF ITS RATTLES!* AS MANY AS **FOUR RINGS** *MAY BE ADDED IN ONE YEAR*

WHERE DOES A MAN DIVORCE HIS WIFE IF HE DOESN'T LIKE THE COFFEE?

See Curioddities next time.

A Man Who Knows Medicine Can Usually Outplay a Medicine Man



LITTLE TAMARACK MEETS A CRISIS

By JAMES B. HENDRYX

Author of Many Stories of the North

I

OLD BETTLES and Swiftwater Bill eyed the man who stepped into the Aurora Borealis Saloon toward noon of a bright day in March.

"Where the hell you be'n fer the last month er so?" Bettles demanded, as Moosehide Charlie joined the two drinking at the bar.

"Me an' a Siwash has be'n prospectin' over east of here," Moosehide replied.

"Was she good-lookin'?" grinned Swiftwater.

"It wasn't no 'she'! No one but some damn chechako would take a klooch prospectin' in winter. This here was one which

he claimed he found colors in a rapids way to hell an' gone up a crick."

"Did you do any good?"

"Oh, there's colors there. But the rapids ain't open only here an' there. I'm goin' back after the break-up."

"There's a band of Siwashes moved in on Little Tamarack," Swiftwater said. "They're camped five, six miles up the crick."

"Yeah, the one I was with belongs to that outfit. They're Mooseheads, an' they've be'n trappin' over east. When I told 'em there was a gold camp on Little Tamarack they moved over, figgerin' to trade here instead of Dawson. They've got a nice bunch of fur."

"They'll prob'ly trade it all fer licker," opined Swiftwater. "That damn Beezly that runs the Caribou Saloon would sell hooch to his drunken gran'mother, if he had one."

"Well, you're the constable," Bettles said. "It's up to you."

"I ain't got no authority outside the camp of Little Tamarack. That's a job for the Mounted. Sellin' hooch to Siwashes is a territorial law."

"We kin damn soon fix that!" Bettles exclaimed. "I'm mayor of this camp, an' we'll go the territorial law one better an' make sellin' hooch to a Siwash a hangable offense on Little Tamarack. An' then," he added, with a grin, "we kin set around an' hope Beezly breaks it."

"A damn cuss like Beezly ort to be hung on general principles—the kind of a dump he runs," grunted Swiftwater. "When we get that law posted I'll shore as hell enforce it—an' mebbe we kin git another corpse fer our graveyard."

"Yer liable to git one before that—the way I feel," Moosehide said. "I've be'n miserable fer the last week, er so."

"Take another shot of licker," Bettles advised.

"What I claim, whiskey's the best medicine there is. It don't make no difference what a man's got, if he drinks whiskey enough he'll git well. Ain't that so, Swiftwater?"

"W-e-e-l-l, generally speakin' whiskey's a good remedy, as sicknesses goes. But there might be some disease where a man might need some other kind of medicine along with it. If I was Moosehide I'd slip over to the store an' git me some salts, er a bottle of pain killer."

"I'm goin' up to see Jase Quill," Moosehide said.

"Jase is all right," Swiftwater agreed. "We're lucky to have a good doctor on Little Tamarack. There ain't no disease Jase won't tackle."

SMOKE was rising from the stovepipe of Jase Quill's cabin as Moosehide thumped on the door with mittened fist. He entered to be cordially greeted by the big chestnut-bearded man who was preparing his noonday meal.

"Jest in time!" Jase announced, setting an extra place at the rude table. "The boys claimed you was off prospectin' somewheres."

"Yeah, over east of here," Moosehide replied, removing cap, mittens, and parka. "I ain't be'n feelin' so good lately. I figger mebbe somethin's ailin' me."

Jase nodded. "You come to the right place," he said, pointing to the battered black bag that protruded from beneath his bunk. "If it's only some kind of a disease that's botherin' you, you ain't got nothin' to worry about. There's better'n twenty kinds of medicine in that satchel, an' damn near every one of 'em works jest as good on humans as they do on anything else. I'll look you over, an' read up in my book, an' then we'll try 'em out an' see which one works. But we'll eat first. Set by, an' I'll dish up the grub."

Moosehide drew a rude stool to the table and seated himself. "I ain't hungry," he said. "Fact is, I ain't felt like eatin' fer a week er so. Nothin' looks good, an' it don't taste good, neither."

"It's yer appetite that's botherin' you

then," opined Jase, "er mebbe only yer digestion. But you ain't missin' nothin', at that. This here chunk of caribou chaws like rubber, an' you could shingle a house with the gravy. He was an old bull I run onto up a draw, an' he's so damn tough you can't hardly cut the meat short of an ax. This is the third day I've bein b'ilin' this chunk, an' the best I kin do is chaw the juice out of it an' spit the rest on the floor. A man hadn't ort to swaller meat that tough. It mightn't never git through him."

"A little of the soup'll do me," Moosehide said. "I had a couple of shots of licker down to the Aurora. Old Bettles claims whiskey's the best remedy there is."

"Yeah—but Bettles ain't no doctor, an' never was."

"He ain't never sick, though," argued Moosehide. "He's older'n hell, an' he drinks more licker'n any two men in the Yukon."

"Shore. He's drank so much his guts is corned."

"They're which?"

"Corned—like corned beef. Whiskey's made out of corn, an' Bettles has drank so much of it his guts is corned till there can't no disease touch 'em. It takes a long time an' a hell of a lot of whiskey. But you don't need to worry none about bein' sick. I've ondoubtless got some kind of medicine in my satchel that might cure you."

"I shore hope so. I feel like hell."

"I'll fix you up. I'm a doctor, an' my pa was a doctor before me. Fer two generations us Quills has devoted our life to doctorin', an' blacksmithin', an' a little well diggin' on the side. I could take you back there to the Minnesoty iron range an' show you the names on them gravestones in the buryin' ground which damn near every one of 'em was folks that either me or my pa doctored."

"Did they all die?" asked Moosehide, a bit uneasily.

"All them that's buried there did. A man's got to die when his time comes, no matter how good a doctor he's got—er a horse, er a cow. An', fer that matter, a woman, either. But me an' pa kep' the bulk of 'em alive fer a hell of a while, besides doin' all their blacksmithin', an' diggin' most of their wells."

"It must of kep' you busy."

"Oh, shore. But even at that, there wasn't as much sickness as we'd of liked. Them Swedes an' Finns is tough folks. Damn if they was as tough as this meat, though!" he exclaimed in disgust, as he spat a mouthful onto the floor. "Seems like all that b'ilin' jest made it that much tougher! I'll throw the balance to the dogs. If they kin git it down it shore as hell ort to stay by 'em!" Rising from the table he drew a chair to the window. "Set over here by the light an' I'll have a look at you." When Moosehide had seated himself Jase regarded him gravely as he laid the back of his hand against his patient's forehead. "You ain't got no fever to speak of," he announced.

"You'd ort to git one of them little thermometers like Miss Lenna stuck in Camillo Bill's mouth, that time," Moosehide suggested.

"Them patent contraptions is all right fer nurses an' folks like that," deprecated Jase. "But take a doctor, an' if he's worth a damn he kin tell if a man's got a fever by feelin' him. You got a headache?"

"Yeah—off an' on."

"Stick yer tongue out so I kin git a look at it."

"There ain't nothin' wrong with my tongue."

"I'm huntin' symptoms."

"What's symptoms? An' what would you do if you found one?"

"There's different kinds fer different diseases. If I seen a gray moss like on yer tongue I'd know yer stummick er some of yer guts wasn't workin' good, an' I'd doctor you accordin'. Yourn's all right, though. Is yer throat sore?"

"No. I ain't got no sores nowhere."

"Does yer liver hurt?"

"How the hell would I know if it's my liver? Where's it at?"

"It's down there in yer belly. Chances is it's all right, er you'd know it. It's one of the main parts. That's why they call it the liver. You couldn't live if you didn't have none."

"I've had a kind of misery in my back fer about a week."

"We'll git around to that. I allus start on folks at the front. "Be'n feelin' sick to yer stummick?"

"No, not to speak of."

"An' no other pains except a headache an' a misery in yer back?"

"That's about all. But I feel like hell jest the same."

"I've got some headache pills. An' if you'll strip off yer shirt an' lay down there on yer belly on the bunk I'll git to work on yer back. I've got some liniment that'll take the hair off a horse. When I git that rubbed in good I'll guarantee you won't have no more backache." When the patient complied Jase glanced at his bare back. "I see you've got pimples—seen some on yer forehead, too. Do they itch you?"

"Not to 'mount to nothin'."

"If you was a kid I'd know you had the measles. But I guess it's only the hives. They don't cut no figger. Flatten out till I git this liniment rubbed in."

For the next five minutes Jase energetically rubbed the horse liniment into Moosehide's skin. Finally he straightened up. "There," he said, "I'll bet you ain't got no more backache!"

"Cripes!" groaned Moosehide, "I couldn't tell if I have; er ain't! My back feels like it's a-fire! That damn stuff hurts worst that the backache did."

"Yeah, it'll bite a little. That shows it's takin' holt. I'll give you them headache pills, now. Besides that, I'm goin' to slip you a dost of calomel an' help it along with a little blue mass. I'll give you a good dost of eppykak, too. What I claim, fightin' a sickness is jest like fightin' anything else. Git the jump on it. Fight it in front an' behind an' at both ends with everything you've got. Ketch it comin' an' goin'. I ain't got no castor ile here, but when we git down to the store I'll give you a pint er so of it. When you git that down on top of that other medicine yer goin' to see results, one way an' another. You might not git no hell of a lot of stud played fer the next couple of days, but you'll git well —er vicy vercy. I can't find nothin' fatal the matter with you."

"That's good," Moosehide said. "How much do I owe you?"

"I can't tell yet. I've got a little readin' up to do. A man sort of fergits what's a dost on some of these medicines. It's liable to make a difference—like if a doctor would give a man as much strychnine as what he would salts, the chances is it would kill him."

"Strychnine!" exclaimed Moosehide, "Cripes—don't give me no strychnine! That's what they pizen wolves with."

"Shore. An', like I said, it would pizen a man, too—if you was to give him enough.

"A doctor's s'posed to know how much of any medicine would kill a man, an' give him a little less than that. But your case don't call fer no strychnine."

"I'm glad of that," said Moosehide, with evident relief. "Is any of these medicines liable to kill a man?"

"Most of 'em ain't—if you give the right dost. Wait till I look in my book. Here it is—The Fambly Physician an' Household Remedies fer Man an' Beast, To Which Is Appended a Hundred Good Receipts fer the Housewife, is the name of it. An' there ain't no common disease that a man, er a horse, er a cow, er a hog, er a sheep kin git that this book don't tell how to cure it—an' that goes fer mules, an' wimmin, an' even children. Not only that, but it tells how to cook, an' shear sheep."

"At the same time?"

"Hell, no! How could anyone cook an' shear sheep at the same time?"

"That's what I was wonderin'. But it

looks like anyone would know how to do 'em separate."

After consulting his book Jase reached for his black bag. "Here, take this powder an' foller it up with this blue mass. Then I'll give you a dost of eppykak, an' when we git down to the store we'll foller it up with a historic dost of castor ile."

"What's a historic dost?"

"That's a sayin' us doctors has got when we give enough medicine all to onct so's we're bound to git results—one way er another. You'll know more about that, later. What your guts needs is a damn good churnin'."

"Cripes, look at all the different medicine in there!" Moosehead exclaimed, peering into the bag. "I didn't know there was that many diseases a man could git!"

"Yeah, there's a sight of diseases. There's even some that none of them medicines would touch. But I kin cure all the common ones. Take this here bottle, fer instance. I picked that up in a drug store in Duluth, an' I've had damn good luck doctorin' the dispeptcy, an' the lung fever, an' summer complaint with it—besides bein' good fer colic in horses, an' the distemper in dogs."

"What's in these here blue an' white papers?"

"Them's what they call Seidlitz powders. I'd heard 'em well spoke of, so I laid some in one time down to Hibbing. They're s'posed to work together—a blue one an' a white one to a dost. The trouble is, I fergit which one you give first. If you give 'em the right way they're claimed to work good. But if you was to give 'em in the wrong rotation they're liable to back fire on you an' blow yer patient all to hell. I've been puttin' off tryin' 'em out 'cause with patients scarce as they be, I'd hate to lose one. It looks like I'd be takin' a chanct."

"Like *you'd* be takin' one! How about the patient?"

"Yeah, there's his angle, too. But I would doctor someone free if he'd let me try out them powders on him. He'd have a fifty-fifty chanct, at that. An' we could go out doors where it wouldn't mess everything up if it didn't work the first time."

"First time—hell! There wouldn't be no second time!"

"Well, mebbe not—fer that patient. But it's one of them things us doctors is s'posed to do fer the good of humanity. We call it research. We've got to resk a patient, now an' then, in the interests of science."

"I'd ruther pay fer my doctorin'," opined Moosehide. "How much is it?"

Jase considered. "Well, there's the medicine. 'Course, I didn't have to waste no hell of a lot of brains on the case, but you've took up a good hour an' a half of my time, what with the back-rubbin' an' readin' up, an' all. At goin' wages that figgers two dollars. Call it six dollars, all told—two fer the medicine, two fer the time, an' two fer the knowledge. Does that suit you?"

"Shore, Jase. A man shouldn't kick on that, if he gits well."

"An' if he don't he couldn't kick. Tellin' you the truth, I try to keep my price down to where a man would ruther git doctored than die. We'll be goin' down to the Aurora Borealis now, an' see about a stud game. We'll stop in the store fer that castor ile, an' I'll fetch my satchel along in case you'll be needin' another dost of something er other."

As they left the cabin Moosehide glanced at the big man. "It don't look like you'd need to lug that big book along, too," he said, a note of apprehension in his voice. "Yer shore you got them doses right, ain't you? I'd hate fer to git pizened, er blowed up, er somethin'."

"Don't worry. I'm packin' the book in case someone else would git sick. A man can't never tell when someone's goin' to ketch somethin'. An' all them diseases ain't as simple as yourn."

"What have I got?"

"Well, it's what us doctors calls complications. It could be a lot of things—er mebbe jest one," Jase replied.

"By God the way I feel, I'll bet it's somethin' important!"

"You'll feel different when them medicines begins to take holt," Jase comforted. "I give you enough to work on damn near every part of you—even if you was a horse."

II

MISS LENNA KINKAID, hard-boiled gold stampeder, nurse by profession and temporarily employed as waitress at the Bon Ton Restaurant in the boom camp of Little Tamarack, frowned as the two entered the restaurant where some half dozen of the sourdoughs were finishing their dinner. "Well, what's your excuse?" she demanded, a note of truculence in her tone. "These other men claimed they were late on account of a stud game. I suppose you've been off somewhere playing two-handed casino! This dump isn't Delmonico's. We've got regular meal times—and three o'clock in the afternoon isn't one of 'em."

"You couldn't of guessed no wronger if you'd tried," replied Jase loftily. "We ain't be'n playin' cards. We don't want nothin' to eat. Nor neither it ain't three o'clock in the afternoon, lackin' ten minutes. I jest stopped in to leave my satchel an' book, so in case I'd need 'em I would not have to go back to the cabin. We et up to my place where I've be'n doctorin' Moosehide."

"Doctoring him?" asked the girl with professional interest. "What's wrong with him?"

"Nothin' to speak of. He's got a sort of combination headache an' backache, with a touch of hives throw'd in. I fixed him up all right, barrin' a dost of ile he's still got comin'."

"Hives? You say he's got hives? Where are they?"

"On him."

"Oh," replied the girl, her voice heavy with sarcasm. "I thought maybe you pulled 'em with your claw hammer and were carryin' 'em around in your bag, like you did that tooth you knocked out of that chechako. I want to have a look at those hives."

"There's some on his forehead, an' some more on his chist an' back, an' some further down than that," Jase explained. "I seen 'em when I was rubbin' the liniment in."

"Take off your cap," the girl ordered, stepping close to Moosehide. When the man complied, she examined the protuberances critically. "And you say you've got a headache and a backache?" she asked.

"Yes, mam. Not enough to cripple me, but plenty to make me feel rotten."

Stepping behind the counter, the girl returned with a clinical thermometer which she thrust into the man's mouth.

"He ain't got no fever to speak of," Jase said, eyeing the procedure with an air of tolerance. "I felt him. There ain't nothin' much wrong with him."

"No. Nothing much," retorted the girl, reading the thermometer, "except a swell case of smallpox!"

There was a sudden commotion at the table as the sourdoughs grabbed up coats, caps, and mittens and made a stampede for the outside. But Lenna forestalled them, barring the way with her back against the closed door. "Where do you

think you're going?" she demanded. "To start a panic in camp?" She turned to Jase and Moosehide. "You two stand right where you are till we dope this out." To Bettles she said, "You're the mayor of this camp, and Swiftwater's the constable. If you sourdoughs lose your heads and make damn fools of yourselves, what can you expect of the chechakos? It's up to you men to handle this thing."

"That's right, Miss Lenna," Bettles agreed. "You tell us what to do, an' we'll do it. You kin count on us. Ain't it so, boys?"

The others expressed hearty accord, and the girl continued. "We've got to prevent an epidemic. How many of you have had smallpox?"

"I have," Burr MacShane replied.

"Me, too," said Swiftwater Bill.

"Have the rest of you ever been vaccinated?"

The others replied that they had, but questioning revealed that the vaccinations had been performed many years before. The girl turned to the two who stood off to one side. "How about you?"

"I was vaccinated eight, ten year ago down around Haines, the time the smallpox run through the Chilkats," Moosehide answered. "But it don't look like it done no good, if I've got it."

"Shore it didn't," Jase agreed. "My pa was a doctor, an' a damn good blacksmith, to boot. An' he never helt with this here vaccination, an' a lot of other new fangled notions young doctors has got. An' Moosehide ketchin' it proves he was right. I had to git vaccinated down in Minnesoty to keep out of jail. Pa claimed a lot of young doctors got the law passed so folks would have to pay 'em to git vaccinated. So if it ain't nothin' but the smallpox Moosehide's got, I'll read up in my book, an' we'll go ahead an' cure him."

"Read your head off—and then throw your book in the fire," snorted the girl, "and in the meantime I'll try to work out something that will do some good." She turned to Moosehide. "Where did you get this smallpox?"

"Cripes, Miss Lenna, a man can't tell where he got somethin' he didn't know he had!"

"Where have you been?"

"Prospectin' over east of here—me an' a Siwash."

"What Siwash? Where did he come from?"

"He had a long name. I called him 'Pat.' He come from a village over in the mountains. But they're on Little Tamarack, now."

"Where's this Indian?"

"He's up to the village. He stopped there when we come back, this mornin'. He's sicker'n what I be."

"Good Lord!" groaned the girl. "We've got to do something—and do it quick! Were any of those Siwashes sick when you visited them in the mountains?"

"Not that I know of."

"Did you run across anyone else while you were gone?"

"No, mam. That is, not no live folks. We found a dead man in a shack up a gulch."

"A dead man! Did you touch him? Was his face broken out?"

"Well, sence you mention it, I rec'lect he was a kinda pimply lookin' fella. We rolled him in a blanket an' h'isted him up on the roof to keep him away from the dogs an' the wolves, so we could camp in his shack. We hung around there a week prospectin' his gulch, but it didn't show nuthin' much. His dump was——"

"Damn his dump!" cried the girl. "That man died of smallpox and both you and the Siwash caught it."

"But that was a good three weeks ago!"

"How long have you been sick?"

"Not over a week."

"That's right. It would take about ten days to show up." She turned to Jase, who was laboriously thumbing the pages of his book. "I don't suppose you've got any vaccination units, have you?"

The big man favored her with a condescending glance. "No, not them, nor no other new fangled contraption. Wait till I find 'smallpox,' an' I'll tell you how to cure it."

"Shut that damn book and listen to me, Jase Quill!" the girl cried, stamping her foot. "We're up against a terrible situation! If we don't do something—and do it quick—the smallpox will run like wild fire through this camp, and the Siwash village, too. Do you know anything about medical history?"

"What's that?"

"Do you know what they did before Jenner?"

"What who done?"

"Why, the doctors, of course—the ones who had vision, and nerve!"

"I don't know nothin' about Jenny. But I hope they didn't do nothin' before her they hadn't ort to."

"Jenner," snapped the girl, "was the physician who discovered vaccination. Before his time a few doctors were inoculating patients with virus taken directly from the pustules of someone who had the disease in a light form. Lady Montague learned it from the Turks, and——"

"I wouldn't care to hear," interrupted Jase with dignity, "what a lady would learn from a Turk."

The girl turned impatiently to Swiftwater. "You're constable of this camp, and you've had smallpox. Go right up to that village and bring that sick Siwash down here and put him in that empty cabin across the crick. Burr's had it, too, and he'll help you look after him. Bettles, you're the mayor, and it's up to you to see that no one goes near that Siwash village under any circumstances whatever. Moosehide, you go to your cabin and stay there. You've been vaccinated, so you'll probably have a light case. Maybe we can give those Siwashes light cases, too. At least, there's a chance. Within the next day or two I hope those pustules of yours will be ripe enough to yield virus for inoculation. Then Jase and I will get busy." She turned to the big man. "You will help me—won't you, Jase?"

"Why, shore, Miss Lenna! You know you kin count on me. What I claim, us medical folks has got to hang together. I was jest wonderin' if Moosehide don't git ripe quick enough couldn't we use him green?"

"I don't know," smiled the girl, "maybe we'll have to try." She turned to the others. "Do you all understand what you're to do?"

"You bet we do, Miss Lenna!" Bettles exclaimed. "An' bein' as there's a quorum here I'll call a meetin' an' we'll pass a law that will fit the case." He paused and glanced at the others. "Meetin's hereby called to pass the follerin' law, to wit: 'It shall be onlawful to sell hooch, er trade in any way, er to have any contact with any Siwash, except as is ordered by Miss Lenna Kinkaid, who is hereby app'inted health officer of Little Tamarack an' all adjoinin' territory until this law is repealed. Anyone violatin' this law er any part of it shall be deemed guilty of skulduggery in the first degree, an' upon conviction thereof by a duly called miners meetin', shall be hung.' All in favor signify by sayin' 'Aye'."

The legislation was passed unanimously and Bettles turned to the girl. "Whilst Swiftwater is fetchin' the sick Siwash down, Burr kin pack some grub an' blankets to that cabin an' git the fire a-goin'. I'll write out three copies of the new law an' post 'em conspicuous in the Aurora Borealis, an' the tradin' post, an' the Caribou."

Jase Quill turned to the girl. "If Moosehide don't git ripe in a hurry it ain't goin' to do no good to work on them Siwashes," he said. "They've already be'n exposed."

"The inoculation will beat the exposure," she replied. "At least, I hope it will. Anyway, it's the best we can do."

"How would it be to slip up to that shack where Moosehide an' the Siwash found the dead man an' yank the corpse

down off'n the roof an' use his pimples? He might of had a light case, too—fer all we know."

"He had it bad enough to kill him!" retorted the girl.

"Well, there's that angle, too," Jase admitted. "But you gotta remember, Miss Lenna, some folks kills easier'n others. I rec'lect a Finn woman I doctored back in Minnesoty. She had——"

"Never mind your Finn woman!" the girl interrupted. "You go to your cabin and stay there till I send for you. You've been exposed and we've got to keep this disease from spreading. As soon as possible someone's got to go up and burn that shack, corpse and all. We can't leave a plague spot like that for someone else to blunder onto!"

III

SWIFTWATER BILL returned toward evening hauling the sick Indian on a sled. With the help of Burr MacShane he put the man to bed, and later, when Lenna visited the cabin, she found his face a mass of pustules, his pulse rapid and weak, and his temperature a hundred and five.

On the third morning thereafter the girl stepped into the Aurora Borealis Saloon and called Bettles from a stud game. "That Siwash died last night," she said, "and I ordered Burr MacShane and Swiftwater to burn that cabin, and the corpse along with it."

"Hold on, Miss Lenna!" protested Bettles. "It ain't that I give a damn about the cabin—but why not save the corpse fer our graveyard? So fer we ain't got no one in it but a couple of murdered men, an' a couple of hung ones. It would look better to have a few natural deaths along with 'em."

"Listen!" cried the girl. "I've ordered that cabin burned, and it's going to be burned! I'm health officer of this camp, and as long as there's danger of an epidemic, what I say goes."

"Yeah—but I'm the mayor."

Behind the bar, Hank Weed, the proprietor, shifted the half-smoked cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other. "Better let her go, Bettles," he advised. "A health officer rates a mayor in case of emergency. I seen it lawed out one time back in Ioway."

"All right," grinned Bettles. "Damn if I'm goin' to run foul of the law fer no dead Siwash! Have it yer own way, Miss Lenna—an' more power to you."

Upon the following day, using a penknife, the girl succeeded in extracting sufficient virus from Moosehide's pustules to inoculate the entire village of some twenty-odd Indians. As she approached the village, accompanied by Swiftwater Bill, Burr MacShane, and Jase Quill, a sound reached their ears that caused the sourdoughs to exchange glances—the sound of a beating drum.

The Northern natives are a docile and peace loving folk, but the sourdoughs knew that at times they could be roused to fanatic frenzy by the machinations of a shaman.

Rounding a bend in the creek the four came abruptly upon the village of skin tents pitched upon a small flat. The entire population was grouped about a huge fire of dry spruce before which a figure grotesquely garbed in a caribou skin, the head and horns of which were arranged to form a hideous mask, paraded and danced to the accompaniment of the measured beating of the drum.

"They're fixin' to raise some kind of

hell," opined Burr MacShane. "Mebbe Miss Lenna better go back an' let us handle this."

"I'm not going back," retorted the girl. "Go ahead and handle it any way you want to up to the time we start inoculating 'em. Then we'll do it my way. Jase and I have a job to do, and I'm not going back till it's done!"

"Me neither," seconded Jase loyally, as he pointed to the shaman. "What's the idee of him jumpin' around with them horns on his head?"

"He's the medicine man," explained Swiftwater Bill, "an' he's all worked up about somethin'. Mebbe it's on account of that Siwash dyin'."

"How could he know about that?" asked the girl. "The man only died yesterday, and there's been no contact with these people."

"There hadn't better of be'n none," Swiftwater said, in a hard voice, "er somebody's goin' to git hung."

As the four approached the fire the shaman redoubled his gyrations, then paused abruptly to point an accusing finger at the interlopers as his voice rose in a chant of hate.

DISREGARDING the dark scowls of the assembled Indians, Swiftwater, closely followed by the others strode to the fire and halted within arm's reach of the shaman whose incantations rose in a fury of shrill voiced gibberish, accompanied by threatening motions of the hand that gripped a short rod tipped with the foot of an eagle, talons outspread as though about to seize its prey.

At the threatening gesture Jase stepped forward doubling a mighty fist.

"Hold on, Jase!" cautioned Swiftwater. "Let him have his say. He's puttin' some kind of a curse on us. When he gits through it'll be our turn. Then we'll show 'em we've got stronger medicine than what he's got."

Presently, either from sheer exhaustion, or because he had run out of savage invective, the shaman ceased and stood facing them. Reaching out suddenly and grasping the caribou horns with both hands, Swiftwater tore the mask and its attached garment from the man's body, jerking him from his feet so that he sprawled upon the ground. As Swiftwater tossed the contraption into the flames Burr MacShane sat down hard upon the prostrate shaman and twisting his fingers in his long hair rooted his face into the hard-packed snow.

The drum was suddenly stilled as the Indians gazed in horrified astonishment at the sacrilege. Before they could recover from the surprise Swiftwater drew his revolver from its holster, and moving its muzzle slowly back and forth to cover the entire gathering, spoke to them. "Listen," he said, "we don't savvy what old gran-pa here was tellin' you—but whatever it was, it's a damn lie! We come here to help you folks, an' we're goin' to do it, come hell er high water. If any of you savvies Boston *wawa* let him step out here an' I'll tell him what it's all about."

After a moment of silence an Indian rose and advanced to the fire. "Me, I'm savvy Boston *wawa,*" he announced.

"All right. What's old Funny Face all hopped up about?" He pointed to the prostrate shaman who still struggled futility in MacShane's grasp.

"*Nem* no Funny Face. *Nem* Opkika. Heem droonk."

"Drunk! Where'd he git the hooch?"

"Com' man las' night. Got fi' gallon hooch in pack. Say Bostonmans keel Netsekamung an' burn heem up in cabin."

"You mean that sick Siwash I took down from here to camp?"

"Yes. *Nem* Natsekamung."

"Go ahead. Tell the rest of it."

"Man trade hooch to Opkika for fur. Say com' back tonight. Breeng mor' hooch."

"He did, eh? What fer lookin' man was he?"

"She beeg mans. Kin savvy Moosehead *wawa.* Say wan tam ron tradin' pos' on

Porcupine River. Got no whisker on de face. Got de whisker here," he paused and touched his lip with a finger. "Got de gol' toot' here." He indicated his left eye tooth.

"Beezly, by God—to a gnat's hind leg!" cried Burr MacShane.

"Yeah," Swiftwater agreed. "I'm shore glad Bettles had the forethought to make hooch tradin' an' contactin' these Siwashes hangable! We'll 'tend to his case this evenin'." He turned to the Indian. "Go on. What was this here jumpin' jack tellin' you folks?"

"Say hooch man tell heem Bostonmans goin' to keel us all. Me, I'm know dat damn lie. But de res' b'lieve it—git scare—git mad. Opkika say hooch man tell heem Boston klooch com' here an' mak' de scratch on de arm so all de Siwash die, an' de Bostonmans git all de fur."

"Why—the damn coot! Beg pardon, Miss Lenna, I almost called him a hard name. But that's what he is—an' puttin' it mild! He know'd you was comin' up here to inoculate these Siwashes, an' he figgered on gummin' yer game, hopin' they'd keep you out of the village so you wouldn't find out about his hooch tradin'."

"Yeah," agreed MacShane, "an' the hell of it is that, scairt as they be, they might of potted us all! An' they couldn't of be'n blamed much, at that."

"And besides that," cried the girl, "he knew that if we didn't inoculate these people, most of 'em would die! Why, he's a—a murderer!"

"Yeah, an' feelin' like I do now," said Swiftwater Bill, fingering the revolver in his hand, "he'd be damn lucky to live long enough to git hung!" He turned to the Indian. "Listen, you! We're goin' to scratch yer arms, all right, an' put some stuff on the scratch. But it ain't goin' to kill you—it's goin' to keep you from dyin' of the red death. The man that fetched that hooch up here is *kultus*—plenty *kultus*—an' we're goin' back to camp an' hang him higher'n hell! That Siwash I took down from here is dead. No one killed him. He died of the red death. You all know he was so sick he couldn't walk when I took him away." The Indian nodded agreement, and Swiftwater continued. "We burnt his body after he died so other folks wouldn't ketch the red death. You've got to tell these folks that. Give it to 'em straight. Don't lie to 'em. Tell 'em that some of 'em may die, even if they are scratched. But if they don't git scratched the chances is they'll all die." He pointed to Jase and Lenna. "Them two's doctors. Not no fake doctors like old Opikickupus, er whatever his name is. They're real, honest-to-God doctors that cures folks instead of scarin' 'em to death. An' jest to show you there's no shenanigan about it, we're goin' to let 'em scratch our arms an' put the stuff on, jest like they'll do to you folks. We'll go ahead now, right here where you all kin see. But first, you go ahead an' tell these folks what I've told you. Put it acrost to 'em, an' tell 'em we don't want no monkey business about it. Tell 'em if anyone tries to git away before he's scratched, I'll shoot him, shore as hell."

The Indian nodded and, to the surprise and delight of the four whites, he bared his arm and proudly displayed a large vaccination scar. "Me, I'm know 'bout dat git scratch'. Bostonman doctor scratch me wan tam, down Fort Yukon. I'm work on steamboat, me. I'm let Boston klooch scratch me, too—show 'em I ain' scare." Whereupon, he stepped over to Lenna and submitted to the inoculation, as the Indians looked on. And as the three white men followed his example he harangued the natives in their own tongue.

When he had finished they all crowded about, gravely inspected the speaker's old scar, and the new ones on the arms of each. Then one by one, with the exception of the shaman who was forcibly inoculated as he shrieked and squirmed in MacShane's grasp, they submitted to the ordeal without a murmur.

When it was over Swiftwater Bill eyed the spokesman approvingly, and drawing a poke containing half a dozen ounces of dust from his pocket, handed it to him. "You done fine!" he said, heartily. "Yer a good man, an' a smart one. An' yer goin' back to camp with us an' tell the miners' meetin' about that hooch trader. Then you kin stick around an' see him hung. We'd shore had a hell of a time with these folks if it hadn't be'n fer you, an' most likely someone would of got hurt. I can't figger out how you put it acrost to 'em so easy about how the scratchin' would save 'em from the red death."

Screwing one side of his face into a ludicrous grimace, the man winked, "I ain' say nuttin' 'bout dat. Dem no savvy. Me, I'm tell 'em if dey git scratch dey kin savvy Bostonman *wawa*. Den, w'en dey trade de fur, dey no git cheat. I say dat why I savvy Bostonman *wawa*—'cause I git scratch, dat tam."

"Put 'er there, brother!" grinned Swiftwater Bill, extending his hand. "I sort of understated it a while back when I said you was smart. By God, yer a genius!"

IV

RETURNING to camp late in the afternoon Swiftwater Bill, accompanied by Jase and Burr MacShane, proceeded directly to the Caribou Saloon, after leaving the interpreter and the liquor they had seized in the shaman's tent in charge of Lenna Kinkaid. A few chechakos were whirling their partners about the dance hall floor as the "professor" thumped out popular airs on the tinny piano about which were grouped other girls in their tawdry finery.

Half a dozen men played stud at the bar behind which Beezly presided assisted by a hard-faced bartender.

Stepping to the bar Swiftwater ordered drinks, and as Beezly set out bottle and glasses, the constable pointed to a paper appended to a placard placed conspicuously above the back bar, entitled LAW OF LITTLE TAMARACK. "What does that paper say?" he asked casually.

Beezly glanced up at it. "Oh, that's some new law Old Bettles fetched over an' stuck up there. What with all the laws we've got you'd think we was Chicago, instead of a minin' camp."

"What does it say?" persisted Swiftwater. "I can't read it from here without my specs."

"It's somethin' about not tradin' with no Siwashes till that there hash slinger over to the Bon Ton says so. What I mean—it's a hell of a note when a minin' camp's got to be run by a biscuit shooter!" The man paused and leered evilly. "An' what's the hook-up between her an' Bettles? Who the hell does she think she is—the Queen, er somethin'?"

"The hook-up," explained Swiftwater evenly, "is simple to anyone that ain't got a dunghill mind. Bettles is mayor of this camp, an' Miss Lenna is the health officer. An' it might interest you to know that in a time like now, when the camp is threatened with a smallpox epidemic, the health officer has got more authority than any Queen has had in the past four, five hundred years."

Beezly snorted. "Anyone knows they can't hang no one fer tradin' with Siwashes. It ain't legal."

"Yer in error, Beezly," Swiftwater replied, "as you'll shortly find out. The p'int yer overlookin' is the fact that the verdict of a duly app'inted miner's meetin' is legal enough, where there ain't no police an' courts. There's be'n quite a few hangin's by miners' meetin's in the Yukon, an' fer as I know, they're legality ain't never be'n questioned."

"Well, anyway," Beezly growled, "it ain't got nothin' to do with me—so what the hell!"

"Mebbe not," Swiftwater admitted mildly. "Got any fur on hand?"

"Fur? Hell, no! Why would I fool with fur in a gold camp?"

"I wouldn't know onless it was to make a profit."

"A man would be a damn fool to handle fur when he could git dust."

"That's right," Swiftwater agreed, "he shore would. You wouldn't mind, I s'pose, if I'd jest kind of look around a bit—jest in case you was lyin', er had some fur layin' around that you'd fergot about?"

"What the hell do you mean?" Beezly rasped, glaring across the bar.

"Meanin' that I'm goin' to search this dump fer the fur you packed down from the Siwash village, last night. Not that it'll make any difference with the hangin' whether I find it, er not. I fetched down what was left of them five gallon you traded to the Siwash medicine man—an' that'll be about all the evidence a miners' meetin' will need. I fetched down a Siwash, too. An' it ain't goin' to take the boys long to make up their minds on a verdict when he tells 'em how you told old Octipus, er whatever his name is, that we murdered that sick Siwash. An' advised 'em not to let Miss Lenna an' Jase inoculate them natives. The boys'll see that, if the Siwashes done like you told 'em to, they'd not only butchered Miss Lenna an' us that went up there with her, but they'd of spread the smallpox all through this camp—an' mebbe all through the North—a thing you're prob'ly doin' right now, by visitin' 'em."

Noting that as Swiftwater talked Beezly had paled perceptibly and that his eyes had narrowed to slits, Jase Quill moved unobtrusively to the open end of the bar, a few paces to the rear, in order to block an attempted escape.

"It's a damn lie!" Beezly shouted as Swiftwater concluded. "That medicine man can't talk no English He don't even savvy jargon!"

"That's right. You'd ort to know. But another Siwash in the village does, as you'll damn soon find out. Yer under arrest, Beezly. You comin' peaceable, er otherwise? It's all the same to me."

At the words Beezly's right hand jerked from beneath the bar grasping a six-gun. Before he could press the trigger Jase Quill leaped toward him and brought a bung starter down upon his head with an audible thud. At the same instant Swiftwater's gun roared and a pistol dropped to the floor as the bartender clutched at his shattered shoulder with a yelp of pain.

At the sound of the shot all hell broke loose in the Caribou. The piano wound up on a crashing discord as the "professor" dived for safety. Girls shrieked and scurried about as the stud players, in the wake of a couple of housemen made a concerted rush to overpower the three who whirled to face them in front of the bar.

Jase stopped one of the leaders with the bung starter, and Burr MacShane accounted for another with the half-filled bottle that had stood on the bar before him. The others, augmented by the chechakos who had been drinking at the bar closed in and smothered Swiftwater and MacShane in a welter of flailing arms and writhing bodies.

The dance hall girls joined the mêlée, cursing and clawing savagely. Leaping onto the bar Jase Quill reached down, lifted the rinse tub from its place, and sloshed its contents over the struggling tangle of bodies which, surging backward to escape the deluge, overturned the huge stove whose falling pipe filled the room with stinging acrid smoke.

The fight ended abruptly as the mob made for the door, coughing, yelling, cursing.

Shrieking with terror, their bedraggled finery clinging about them, the girls catapulted out into the freezing air and dashed for shelter in the trading post a short distance away.

The tinder-dry floor and walls of the saloon, ignited by coals and blazing chunks of wood from the stove, flamed up so swiftly that by the time the last of the struggling mob staggered out through the

smoke the whole interior was a mass of seething flames.

Attracted by the smoke and the noise the habitues of the Aurora Borealis, headed by Hank Weed and old Bettles, and reinforced by residents of cabins on nearby claims swarmed toward the burning building.

"What come off here?" cried Bettles, as Swiftwater, MacShane, and Jase pushed through the crowd dragging Beezly and the two unconscious housemen with them.

"Nothin' much," replied Swiftwater, "except that Beezly ondertook to resist arrest."

"Beezly! What you arrestin' him fer?"

"Tradin' hooch to Siwashes an' tellin' 'em not to git inoculated."

"Where is he?"

Swiftwater jerked his thumb in the direction of the inert form at MacShane's feet. "Jase shore saved my bacon by knockin' him cold with a bung starter. I was watchin' the barkeep, which he was fingerin' a gun, when Beezly pulled another gun on me."

"We'll call a miners' meetin' when he comes to," Bettles said.

Jase wagged his head dubiously as he eyed the unconscious Beezly. "I tunked him kinda hard," he said. "Mebbe he ain't hangable."

"I'm shore glad you drug him out," Bettles said. "Either way, he'll do fer burial purposes. Damn it. I wisht Miss Lenna had let us save that Siwash corpse instead of burnin' it in that cabin! How the hell are we ever goin' to git a decent graveyard started if we keep wastin' corpses? Did you git them Siwashes fixed up?"

"Oh, shore," Jase replied. "You jest leave all them health measures to me an' Miss Lenna. Them Siwashes'll be all right—what of 'em don't died. A camp's lucky to have a good doctor—an' a good nurse don't hurt none, neither."

"Unaccustomed as I am to murder——" began the sheriff in Tonto City, otherwise known as Henry. That was as far as he got at the moment because the case seemed more one of counterfeiting. Besides, the sheriff had been designated as an alcoholic parasite. Strong language that!

In our next issue . . . . . .

SHORT STORIES for April 10th
out March 25th

HENRY THE SILENT

A long and very characteristic novelette by

By W. C. TUTTLE

THE FLAMING GODS

By TED and MARIA COUGHLAN

I

THROUGH the din of the bazaar, the bells jingling on the camels and donkeys, the cries of sweetmeat peddlers, the hammering in the open-air locksmith shop, the shrilling of Mullah from his minaret, through all this conglomeration of noises Captain Collin's sensitive ears heard the familiar clop-clop of heavy hooves, long before he saw a Cossack galloping on a bony horse.

"What's the matter with Vaska? He'll kill that animal!"

"Looks to me like he'll die first," Lieutenant Willoughby remarked grimly as the Cossack tumbled from the saddle, perspiration streaming down his pale, pock-marked face, and gasped out:

"Lady Mariette—kidnaped!"

Collins' expressive face betrayed anxiety, showing plainly what the girl meant to him.

"Who?" was all he could say, his throat working spasmodically.

Vaska gasped for breath and swayed, unable to add a word. His face was livid. Willoughby took a canteen from his belt.

"Here, drink this vile vodka and answer as soon as you find your words!" He was as shocked as his friend. Marietta was

That Only a Sacrificed Woman Could Appease the Gods of War Was a Potent Belief of the Natives Deep in the Mysterious Caucasus

the daughter of his host, the British consul, who had made his stay in Baku endurable. In those dangerous days people belonging to the same nationality were almost like brothers, and the hospitable consul was the only Englishman Willoughby had met on the Caucasus.

"Kidnaped!" Collins repeated. His usually smiling eyes were now as somber as when he went over the top.

The orderly finally recovered his breath.

"Yes, *barin,*" he reported, saluting feebly. "They wanted the Armenian whom the consul adopted, but kidnaped his daughter instead, because Tamara ran away. They want a sacrifice to the Flaming Gods, to bring about peace. They say only burning a maiden can stop the war." He waved his thin, tanned hand toward the horizon in the direction of the East.

From the hilly part of the bazaar they could see in the distance the low square temple of the fire worshipers, Parsees. Fountains of flame rose from the four towers guarding the temple.

Looking at that weird sight, Collins thought dazedly that, theoretically, the fire worshipers believed in one kindly Deity. Had their head priest gone mad and become a fanatic during the horrors

of war? The Flaming Gods speaking through his insane mouth, multiplied into four, each demanding a human sacrifice—was such a nightmare still possible here?

It was during the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78, and although allied with the Russian army much longer than Willoughby, Collins did not know Russia well. He had been second mate on an American ship, the war found him on the Black Sea, and he had enlisted with the ill-fed, ignorant and disorganized Russian army, after a row with his captain who had unjustly dismissed him.

It was too difficult to return home, the Turks were blockading Russia from the south and, besides, he was a glutton for adventure. On the Caucasus he had met Willoughby, the only English-speaking officer there. They became friends, and soon both got high commissions, because of their courage as well as the Anglo-Saxon efficiency methods which they introduced on that Asiatic frontier.

Willoughby was tall, gaunt, dark eyed; Collins was his very opposite—slight, light-haired, dreamy eyed. Yet the savage tribes from Asia Minor had equal fear of both. The very names of those two "foreign devils" struck terror in the superstitious hearts of the Turks as well as the neutral Parsees and Calmuks.

Even now, as they rode on their bony horses down the main street of Baku, toward the British Consul's house, the dark-eyed Parsee merchants in the jewelry shops scratched their henna-red hair with their ochre-stained fingers and whispered:

"They must have heard—the priest is in danger."

The consul met them on the verandah of his house with blind outer walls and shuttered windows opening on the inner court. The verandah was the English innovation added to his depressingly Asiatic quarters. He looked his despair. His graying hair was in disorder. His British poise had completely left him. He looked a broken man.

"I shall never see her again!" he cried as he shook hands with his visitors. His hand trembled piteously.

From his rambling speech, the friends learned further reason for the kidnaping; the underground gases which caused the flames to shoot through the temple towers, had grown brighter during the past few nights, and they threatened to burn the place. Parsee priests interpreted the phenomena as a sign of heavenly wrath. The Flaming Gods demanded a human sacrifice.

"The raving fanatic ought to be in the insane asylum, and by jove, I'll put him there!" vowed Collins. "Will you help me, Willoughby?"

"Decidedly!" the other answered solemnly. "What are your plans?"

"I'm not the only thinking machine around here. We're one, buddy, but we have two heads, like the Russian Imperial eagle. Shake yours and tell me your plans first."

"Well, we might ask the governor of Baku to give us a regiment of Georgians—" Willoughby began.

Collins slapped his shoulder.

"I was thinking of the same thing. Let's hurry. Good-by, Mr. Reading. Please, hope for the best."

The old man said tearfully, "Save her, Collins, and I'll give you two children my blessing! I've known for some time—Parents are not as blind as you suppose."

"She'll be safe or I shall be dead." Collins jaw tightened.

AGAIN they mounted their horses, which were of good Orlov breed, but emaciated during the oat famine. Collins hated to make his poor beasts gallop, but his heart pounded with impatience, and his thoughts were ahead of his slow steed.

After what seemed to him hours, they arrived at the governor's house, the only brick mansion in the arid suburb of Baku. Only one bed of pansies was planted in the middle of the shaggy front lawn, and their violet-blue blossoms reminded Collins pain-

fully of Mariette's eyes. Would he ever look into them again?

He chased away the sentimental reflection, dismounted, and marched toward the governor's house. It was on a style amazingly like the colonial of his parents home.

Sudden homesickness assailed his heart. Oh, if only he could take Mariette back to the States!

The war seemed endless; if the Parsees felt as weary of it as he did, no wonder they were ready to deliver human sacrifices to stop it.

"Act, don't think!" he reproached himself, waiting for the governor. At last an orderly took him and Willoughby to the inner chamber.

The governor sat on a Turkish ottoman in his den decorated with hunting trophies and filled with dense cigar smoke. All the windows were closed.

"How those Russians hate fresh air!" Collins reflected remembering the fine spring day outside. A great brass *samovar,* polished so that it reflected the room like a distorted mirror, stood on the carved oak table strewn with maps and war reports. The water was boiling, and the escaping steam made a mosquite-like "samovar song." The governor was drinking his eleventh glass of weak *kiahta* tea and wiping the perspiration from his forehead with a rainbow colored handkerchief. He was a typical Czar's officer, with broad side whiskers, a curious mixture of informality and stiffness, receiving his subordinates in his private room, yet wearing full uniform and stays. His collar was open, disclosing his short, red neck.

"Sit down, gentlemen," he said to his visitors—much amazed by such a breach of discipline. "Since you are here on leave, I'll treat you as guests. Will you have some tea?"

"Thank you, Your Highness," said Collins with his best military bow, "but we can't stay." Briefly he explained the reason for their visit.

The governor, visibly perturbed, wiped his baldish head and opened a few more buttons on his uniform.

"*Horosho,* Captain Collins. You're almost a legend on Caucasus. I'll let you take command of the regiment now stationed at the lead mines—you know where that is? In the valley among the first low range of the mountains. You can reach it via the White Devil's pass. Of course, the men are there to protect the valuable metal, but it isn't very likely that the Turks would venture so far. Once or twice they bribed a mountain tribe to steal some lead from the mines' storehouse, and smuggle it to Asia Minor, but after that last punishing expedition, I trust to God that we'll have peace there."

He crossed his breast thrice, with three of his short fat fingers cupped together, in Orthodox fashion. In spite of his many vices of which all Caucasus knew, the governor was superficially religious.

He called his adjutant, an effeminate young man with a quill pen behind his left ear, and dictated to him an official document authorizing Collins to take command of the Georgians stationed in the lead mines. Collins asked him to make a provision that in case he were killed, Lieutenant Willoughby would take over the command.

"You two are like twins," the governor smiled. "God speed you! I should have ordered the Flaming Gods temple razed long ago. Well, best wishes for future engagements!"

The friends left, somewhat bewildered by their reception.

"A Russian governor confessing a mistake to his inferiors!" Willoughby remarked.

"And imagine a man wearing stays! Did you notice that?"

"Notice it? Boy, I heard them creak!"

"How on earth do they expect to win the war with those corseted officers in command?" remarked Willoughby.

"Well, maybe they yank them off before a battle," Collins speculated.

They unhitched their horses greedily chewing the few blades of grass they could snatch before being urged on.

"Poor beasts! Wait till we are in the mountains, you'll get plenty of wild clover." Collins patted the back of his bony Orlov mare.

II

BUT the horses had no opportunity to taste the wild clover. Collins and Willoughby lost no time in getting away, but no sooner had they cautiously ascended the first mountain slope, than a few silent darts put a sudden end to their horses' services.

Tumbling from his mare, Collins had the impression of being struck by some unseen hand—the hand of a ghost. He was used to the roar of cannon and the whistle of bullets; they would have made less impression on him than this sudden, noiseless death. Something supernatural seemed to hover in the air, bringing mortal danger to those who attempted to oppose the Flaming Gods.

He scrambled to his feet and ran toward Willoughby who sat by his dying horse. In silence, they took their revolvers from the holsters strapped to their belts, and held them ready, climbing up cautiously and longing to see the enemy.

But the mountain pass seemed empty. A gigantic glacier rose, ghostlike in the lengthening shadows; its bluish tinge suggesting the livid hue of corpses. The cold current of air emanating from the glacier, mingled with the warm drafts from the plains, making the travelers shiver.

How numerous were those invisible enemies, hiding, perhaps, behind that sheer wall of ice? Collins body plastered against the chilling surface, he thrust his head forward, peering into the dimness of the tortuous passage.

At first he saw nothing. Then the bluish walls of the glacier seemed to waver, as if melting. Something which looked like irregular slabs of solid snow detached itself from it.

"Willoughby," he whispered, stupefied, "do you see that wall move?"

Willoughby nodded. Fearless before any ordinary, daylight danger, he wavered before the supernatural aspect of this one. Tightening his grip on his gun, he thought grimly that one could not fight that ghastly thing with bullets.

"They are only men in white!" Collins fairly shouted with relief. Innumerable white-clad warriors, bristling with *kingals*, but living, normal enemies!

Almost gleefully they rushed toward the mountaineers, aiming steadily. The shots, magnified to a roar by the mountain echo, struck terror into the hearts of the natives seldom confronted by firearms. When the smoke dispersed, the friends saw them scuttling down the slope with the agility of mountain goats. But several of them rolled down the hill grown over with slippery blue grass, never to rise again.

One man lay at Willoughby's feet. Collins bent over the dead body and examined its face, calm and dignified in death; an elderly man with a henna-stained beard and strange signs tattooed on his forehead.

"We've killed a fire worshiper of high caste!" he groaned. "Now we're for real trouble!"

With set jaws, they now waded through the melting snow disclosing the rotting slippery grass, through that ominous White Devil's Pass. When they climbed down into the valley of the lead mines, tired and stiff from cold, damp wind brought to their

nostrils the smell of broiling *shashlyk*. Collins smacked his lips in anticipation.

"I hope we get there in time for supper. Strange—they usually have their supper much earlier."

He tried to tell the time by the sun. But it had already sunk behind the forbidding glacier, and only the frozen white top shone with the reflected light of the afterglow, red like freshly spilled blood.

"Look down, Collins. Bonfires near the mines! They seem to be having a feast down there. Hear the *zurnas* strumming?"

Collins heard the monotonous sounds of the stringed instruments and saw men dancing around the bonfires.

"They look as if they were on furlough," Willoughby remarked.

BUT it was not the Georgian soldiers whom Willoughby saw dancing. When the friends reached the entrance to the mines, the gatekeeper informed them that the Georgian regiment had been called away, to quench a new uprising of rebellious tribesmen.

"Who is feasting then?" Collins asked, dismayed.

"The miners, *barin*. They unearthed a vat full of wine and are having their fill."

"Unearthed, you say? Who would bury wine?"

"Don't you know our custom, *barin?* When a boy-child is born in the *sakla* of a mountaineer, he buries in the ground an earthen vessel full of wine. When the boy grows to be a man, they dig the wine out and drink it. But this time the vat was a wild find."

"What is a wild find?"

"Nobody's wine. Some people pull up their stakes and move forgetting about the wine; then it is found, all the village gets drunk. This time our men found 'nobody's wine,' digging for clams in the river. It was easy to dig it out. Uusually those vats are buried deeper, in dry places. It isn't so good, it has queer taste—the water must have seeped through the vessel. Still, it gets to one's head and gladdens one's heart."

Collins whispered in English, "I'm suspicious of that wine—"

THE gatekeeper took them to the director of the mines, a Mr. Batavin, an elderly chemical engineer who spoke English fluently. With characteristic Russian frankness, the director told his visitors all about his troubles in that wilderness, as soon as they were through with their supper consisting mostly of broiled *shashlyk* and cheese, and washed down with tea mixed with rum. They, in turn, told him all about their thwarted plan.

Collins thought about Mariette in mortal danger while listening absent-mindedly to the engineer's complaints about the laziness of his workers, their rebellious spirit, their superstitious practices. He remembered that the Parsees offered their sacrifices with the first star.

He looked out of the window, and with relief noted that the sky was overcast; it was not a favorable night for a sacrifice.

"Have some more tea!" the engineer punctuated his talk, pouring glass after glass from the pot-bellied samovar. "Tea never hurt anyone! Especially when you add some good rum to it. Now about that kidnaping— If my miners were not so resentful toward us just now—you know we had disorders which lasted for weeks—then I would ask them to help you. They all shoot pretty well, you know. But I'm afraid they would not listen to me, and our Georgians are on a punitive expedition. Although I'm not so sure who will punish whom in that scrap."

"Have you any idea when will the regiment return?" Collins asked anxiously. "I'm authorized to take command of them. By the way, will you keep this document for me, until I need it?"

He took out of his breast pocket the bulky parchment with a decorative red seal bearing the emblem of the Imperial double-headed eagle, and handed it to Batavin.

"I'll keep it in my safe, but God only knows if you will ever need it!" the pessimistic Russian shook his head. "Those native jackals may finish our Georgians."

"But aren't the Georgians natives, too?"

"Yes, but they're different! They are Christians, still loyal to Russia. More tea?"

The friends drank their tea gloomily. How were they to fight the fire worshipers, how were they to prevent human sacrifice? Even if they took with them the military guards who remained at the mines, how could they penetrate with that handful of men into the fortress-like temple of The Flaming Gods?

The intolerable silence dragged on. Batavin was the first to break it.

"I have a plan!" he suddenly declared jubilantly. "I'll tell you all about it. But first, let's have more light. Those candles smoke too much and drip all over the table. Ivan, hey, Ivan!" he called snuffing out the candles. For a while the room was lighted only by the fire burning in the fireplace.

The barefooted servant came stepping as softly as a cat. His sleepy round face framed in whitish hair betrayed more cunning than intelligence.

"At your service, *barin,*" he said with servility which seemed to Collins too exaggerated to be sincere.

"The light!" the engineer ordered curtly.

Ivan removed the bulky kerosene lamp from its high stand, wiped the wick with his already dirty sleeve, took from his pocket a piece of stone and a piece of metal and struck them against each other producing sparks. It took him a long time to light the lamp. Finally it was fixed, yet the servant did not go away. His lips moved as if about to speak.

"What's on your mind, Ivan?" his master asked.

"The miners, *barin*—they drink too much. Some are asleep already."

"That's all right. The sooner they drink themselves to sleep, the earlier they'll get up and go to work in the morning. Get out, Ivan, I don't need you any more."

The boy wanted to add something more. His face looked somber; he had some grave news, but he was afraid to speak. The fear of being the first to bring bad news was inborn in him, the olden messengers of disaster were given unto death. He shook his head and left the room.

That room, situated in the tower of the ancient Caucasian castle, recently converted into a munition factory manufacturing bullets from the lead found in the mines, was damp and drafty. Even the fireplace gave but little warmth in the chilly evening of early spring. The invisible ice seemed to be melting there, in the mists rising from the valley. What a difference from warm, sunny Baku, Collins thought, worried to distraction about Mariette imprisoned, perhaps in another tower—the flame-bearing tower of the Parsees' temple.

The lamplight, swayed by the drafts, sent shadows dancing on the high walls hung over with faded tapestries. This was the wing of the castle reserved for the director's dwelling, and it was also a splendid observation point, facing the opening in the mountains through which the enemy was likely to come. As he spoke, the engineer looked out of the window. In the misty moonlight, the bonfires gleamed like the red eyes of angry beasts.

"I hope the guards don't drink themselves to sleep. But those Don Cossacks carry their liquor well."

Collins, who had been too wrought up to follow any talk except that which bore directly upon the mission, asked impatiently:

"How about your plan, Mr. Batavin?"

The engineer returned from the window niche, sank into a ragged plush chair, and beckoned his guests to move closer.

"The walls have ears here," he explained. "I don't trust even Ivan."

Just then they heard some one running up the bare stone stairs. The door swung open, and a breathless man in a worn gray *shinel* burst into the room, and Collins saw it was Vaska.

"*Barishnia* Tamara is kidnaped, too" he gasped out. "I met a mail coach just outside Baku, and the driver gave me a lift clear to the White Devil's Pass."

"Have you seen anything—a human body lying there?" Collins asked uneasily.

"No. But this is what I found." Vaska produced a piece or dry goatskin with an inscription in Arabic stenciled on it. The large, curiously twisted letters looked to Collins like squirming insects about to bite. He scrutinized the message, puzzled.

"Can you read it, Mr. Batavin?"

Batavin put on his horn-rimmed spectacles and translated slowly as he read:

"'A son of Zoroaster was killed here. We will come—and deliver—the guilty ones—into the hands.' I don't understand the rest," he frowned.

Collins turned to his orderly:

"Thank you for bringing the news, Vaska. Why, you are wringing wet!" he added, noticing the watery spot forming around the Cossack's feet. "Look at that pool of water under him, Mr. Batavin! Haven't you a spare suit for him?"

"Why, yes. Go down to the kitchen—it's in the basement—and warm yourself, son. Ask for Ivan. He'll give you a pair of foot-wrappers and a burka."

But the Cossack did not move, the pool of water around his boots growing larger and larger.

"Get out or you will drown us!" said Collins. Then he looked into the eyes of his orderly.

"What else do you know, Vaska?" he questioned him gently.

"I heard, *barin,* when I drove here—sure, it may be only rumor, but I thought I better tell you. I heard that some tribe in Turkish service is going to make a raid on this factory. And there is another thing: *barishnia* Mariette and *barishnia* Tamara are with the women of the Parsees, so I heard in the Bazaar. The fire worshipers will keep the girls in their harem for two days more, until their holiday of The Evening Star."

"Why didn't you tell me that first?" Collins shouted joyfully. Mariette was safe for at least two days!

"Always serve the good news on top of bad," Vaska grinned, disclosing his teeth yellow from chewing mahorka.

"Here, take this!" Collins tossed Vaska his tobacco pouch. It was not a trifling gift; there was scarcity of tobacco during the war.

After the orderly left the room, the engineer began:

"Now I'll tell you my plan. I hope there will be no more interruptions."

"But what measures are you going to take against those invaders Vaska warned us against?" Willoughby asked.

'The tribesmen? Well, what can I do if the regiment is away? None can escape his fate."

He started to unfold his plan, while his guests marveled at his quiet fatalism.

"I recently discovered a secret passage apparently leading from the mines to the temple of the fire worshipers. I never ventured to explore it to the end—I hate unexpected meetings, you know—but I'm pretty sure it leads to their lair. Some inscriptions on the walls indicate that. The passage is situated—wait a bit, I'll show you."

He took from his desk a plan of the mines and spread it under the lamp.

"You see, here is a narrow tunnel running alongside the passage, all the length of it. I think, except the last few hundred feet or so, just near our factory. That part of it is obstructed by some old land-

slide. Our soundings show that the tunnel is shaped somewhat like a syphon, with its shorter part at our side. I figured out that the underground gases which feed the flames to the temple, used to flow through that tunnel. Do you know the legend bound with the castle? The one about the cruel Circassian princess who used to burn her discarded lovers in some unearthly flame? I think the legend refers to those flames which now burn in the four towers of the Parsees temple."

"The Flaming Gods?"

"Yes. I hate to see all that power going to waste. I've been thinking for some time about putting those flames to work. It takes a tremendous amount of fuel to purify the ore. Have you seen that great furnace outside? It has to be fed day and night. Now if we could make those underground gases work for us— It's good gas, giving steady, white hot flames when under control. Unfortunately self-igniting when under friction of the hot dry air. Now if we put it to use——"

"What has that to do with rescuing the girls?" Collins asked impatiently.

"I'm coming to that. If we could transfer the underground gases from the temple to our furnaces—make them flow through their old tunnel—not only would the factory gain a perpetual source of fuel but the Flaming Gods would cease to exist. The fire would disappear from the temple. In the absence of the Flaming Gods, there could be no sacrifice."

"How beautifully simple!" cried Willoughby. Collins looked at the engineer with hopeful eyes.

"When are we going to dig the tunnel?" he asked eagerly.

"The tunnel is all there, only some hundred feet of it are obstructed by a landslide. I'll order our miners to set to work at sunrise. There is no use asking them to start right now," he added, reading the disappointment in Collins' expressive face. "Those superstitious moujicks won't work at night."

Collins sighed, exasperated.

"Now, try to get some sleep," their host advised. "I'll put you up for the night in the gate house."

IT WAS a fitful night for Collins. He tossed and moaned, dreaming about Mariette being led into flames, while his chum snored.

Willoughby could sleep through a cannonade.

When the sun dipped scarlet the snow-covered mountain peaks of Caucasus, the friends ate a hasty breakfast, washed themselves in icy water and started for the engineer's quarters. A strange sight stopped them.

From the eastern window of the lodge they saw on the horizon a row of small black hills, never in view there before. When their eyes became accustomed to the wavering film of mist, they noticed that those hills moved; Collins grabbed his field glasses.

"Why, these are men!" he gasped.

"Let me see, bo!" Willoughby stretched his hand.

Just then a long, thin spear whirled within an inch of his hand.

"Keep your hands to your sides and don't lean out of the window!" Collins said sharply. "Oh, well, if you insist," he amended. "Here, see the *burkas?"*

Another spear hissed by Collins' curly head.

"Burkas," he explained wryly, "are those conical black capes those mountaineers are wearing. They looked like black hills from the distance, didn't they?"

"What are those tribesmen?" Willoughby asked. "Ouch!" he cried, dropping the glasses. "My hand!"

Collins bent quickly and pressed his mouth to his friend's wounded hand, then spit a mouthful of blood, as if it were tobacco juice.

"The darn spear might be poisoned," he explained in a matter of fact tone.

"Well, I'll be damned," Willoughby

said dazedly, "You jolly fool, always taking chances."

The spears almost ceased to fly. Now the little black hills approached fast. The two friends could see heads covered with high fur *papahas*. The men ran, in spite of their hampering garments.

"What are we going to do?" asked Willoughby.

"Surrender!" Collins proposed calmly. "Martyrdom doesn't appeal to me. I'm going to wave that white flag." He ran toward the bed. "Let's skin this pillow," he murmured, taking off the questionably white pillow case, just after a stray spear ripped open the pillow, sending the feathers flying all over the place.

"I won't surrender," Willoughby protested. "Let's call the guards to arms."

"Sure! Fire a cannon and see if they'll wake! Didn't you see them drinking last night? The archangel's trumpet wouldn't wake them so early!"

Collins' words, meant as a grim joke, were not exaggerated. When Willoughby ran down to call the guards from the mines, he found them in deep sleep, a sleep over which he had no power. The trumpet of Judgment Day alone could wake those breathless men, whose faces were swollen and black.

"My God, poisoned!" he gasped.

He remembered how easy they were told it had been to dig out the great earthen vessel of wine. It must have been planted there on purpose by those devils in black capes who were now storming the gate.

He put two fingers into his mouth and whistled. Collins' answering whistle came from the gatekeeper's room. Willoughby wondered if his friend knew about this new catastrophe. Desperately he fingered his pistol. What would the weapon avail him, with its few bullets against that swarm of tribesmen? Still, his British obstinacy prevented him from surrendering without a fight. As the first tribesman crashed the gate, the lieutenant aimed his revolver.

Two strong warm hands grasped his, and the revolver was wrestled from him.

"You don't want to leave me alone with the whole gang?" Collins asked reproachfully. "They'd tear you to pieces after your first shot! Besides, they will probably lead us to the girls' prison." Collins turned and shouted a few words in Russian to the tribesmen:

"Horosho!" was the instant answer. Apparently the invaders were not prepared for a stiff fight, having assured their entrance by poisoning the guards. They grinned like cruel children, unconscious of any inhumanity in their deed.

"Russian troops will be here soon." Collins tried to appeal to their instinct of self-preservation, but the tribesmen understood only the words of surrender which he had previously shouted.

"Gosh, I wish I could speak this Kurdustani or whatever their gibberish is!" Collins cried, exasperated.

He allowed himself to be bound, and urged Willoughby 'to undergo the little operation' without protest. It was a trial for the proud Englishman to be searched by the dirty hands which dived into his pockets, taking away his letters from home, his money, his spare box of cartridges. He groaned, setting his teeth.

The natives led their captives toward the mines.

"Are they going to throw us down a shaft?" Willoughby wondered.

Collins shrugged his shoulders and watched his captors, the two giants in black burkas with swarthy faces grinned, answering his probing smile. But Collins recalled with sinking heart that they had grinned also when he reproached them for poisoning the miners.

III

AT THE entrance to the mines the guards held a brief consultation by the dark opening of a shaft. There was a primitive contraption reminding one of scales. The natives looked at it hesitatingly.

One of them made ominous gestures, and as if in answer Collins grinned his brightest. The cruel intention of the native melted under the warmth of that smile, and he led the captives away from the yawning shaft.

They found another, sloping entrance to the mines, and went there, stepping along its slippery floor. In the dim light, they saw a door to the miners' storage room, now empty save for a few discarded rubber boots. It had been abandoned, and great drops of water dripped from the walls. During the spring thaw the place was too damp for keeping tools.

The natives pushed Collins and Willoughby inside, cried out a mocking salaam, shut the door behind their prisoners, and bolted it from the outside.

The friends sank down onto a pack of rotting straw lying in the corner, and Collins wrinkled his sensitive nose.

"Rats!" he opined.

"I hope they aren't hungry," Willoughby's teeth were chattering from the chill of the cave.

"Here is our first visitor," Collins reassured him grimly.

A gigantic rat scuttled toward him, an emaciated creature flat as if cut out of black cardboard.

"What are we to do?" Willoughby questioned the walls of their prison glistening with selitra. He dared not look into Collins' face. If his optimistic American friend despaired, there was no hope.

Suddenly Collins bent over his friend's tied hands, and smelled the ropes.

"Hurrah for hope! Listen, I'll lie on my face and you watch over me; when a rat attempts to bite me, kick it, kick it hard! But when it tries to bite the ropes, let it. These ropes smell of grease."

After a tantalizing silence, a rat walked along Collins' back; he squirmed with revulsion, but frightened the rat away only for a moment. It returned and scurried farther. It sunk its teeth into the rope.

Collins muttered, then cried "ouch," as the rat which finally bit through the rope, attacked his hand.

With an effort he tore the rodent from his bleeding hand, sprang up and kicked the animal away. But more rats came, silently menacing, their little beady eyes gleaming like sharp needle points.

Collins rushed to his friend, untied his hands, threw the greasy ropes to the vanguard of the advancing rats, to appease them for a while.

"Where do we go from here, boys?" he asked briskly, addressing the walls; and the resonant echo of the cave repeated faintly:

"... here, boys."

The last attempt at a smile left his face, darkened by the realization of the unescapable danger. The massive door bolted from the outside would not budge an inch in spite of his and Willoughby's efforts. There was no tool to break it open with. The situation seemed hopeless. The grayish light trickling down from a small round window far above the ground offered no hope; the window was hardly large enough to let in even a cat.

As if in answer to Collins' somber thoughts, he heard low, monotonous moan-like sounds in the distance.

Willoughby stopped throwing the miner's old rubber boots at the approaching rats.

"Hear that? Let's bang at those resonant walls."

Together they banged their fists against the sharp stones until their knuckles bled, kicking all the while at the rats which attacked them. For a while the singing ceased. As they were losing hope of being heard, the singing began again and grew louder and nearer. Steps approached the storage-cave, then voices talking in a strange language. The bolt was lifted from the door, the hinges squeaked and the friends were blinded by sudden light.

When their eyes readjusted themselves to the sudden light, they saw smoky torches carried by white-robed men.

"Out of the frying pan into the fire!"

Willoughby remarked grimly. "These are our friends, the Parsees."

The leader addressed them in broken Russian. From his long tirade, Collins understood only, "—sacrilege and punishment." But these words were enough to send an icy shiver down his spine.

"Are you going to burn us?" he asked.

"The sacred fire must not be polluted with the bodies of the God's enemies! Only virgins are fit to be sacrificed to the Flaming Gods. You will die of the tortures of the soul," was the mysterious reply.

Collins repeated his question and received the same answer twice, before he understood the words of this sentence. Yet even then he did not understand its meaning.

"What the hell do they mean by tortures of the soul?" he asked Willoughby after translating to him what the leader had said.

"Some monkey tricks, I suppose. They will try to frighten us, that's all." His friend tried to sound casual.

"Well, I'd like to see the man who could make me die from fright!" Collins exclaimed boisterously. But he felt cold in the pit of his stomach. He abhorred mysteries smacking of supernatural. He had inherited that weakness from his Irish ancestors who believed in ghosts and witches.

As they were led out of the cave and further into the mines, he whispered to Willoughby:

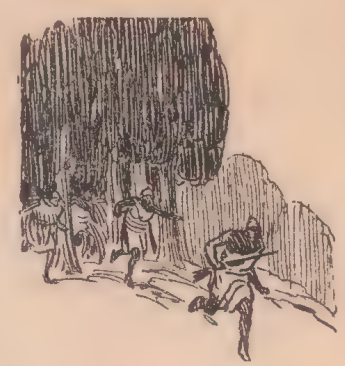
"You know, they must have been looking for us. They knew about our mission and went to the mines after us. Batavin was right, this underground passage must run all the way to the temple, under the mountain. I wonder what happened to him?"

"If he was foolish enough to offer resistance, the tribesmen killed him."

"I hope not. That was a wonderful plan he had! If he only escaped. The Georgian regiment might return any day, and then——"

"Don't trust your American optimism!" Willoughby interrupted him brusquely. "There's no use waiting for that problematic help. Only by our own wits——"

"I'm not good at thinking now, old man. My brain fairly reels. Tired as I am, I would rather put up a stiff fight than invent an idea. Still——" His eyebrows contracted, as he eyed the passage. It was



long, gradually sloping down. At one of its intricate turns, the captives noticed with surprise a kind of sledge with greased bottom. Collins' sensitive nostrils detected at once the smell of sheep's fat.

THE Parsee leader pointed to the front seat of the sledge. The captives sat on the bench covered with ragged bearskin, their feet sticking out of the low and narrow seat.

They felt a sudden jerk, and the curious sledge started rolling faster and faster. For a moment Willoughby made a jerk, as if to jump off, but two strong hairy hands with ochre-stained fingernails were laid on his chest from behind, and his guard's breast was pressed to his back in a breathtaking embrace. Something sharp tickled his ribs. "A *kinjal,*" he thought.

Collins was gasping for breath in a similar embrace. As the sledge slid down faster and faster, bumping over the uneven ground of the tunnel, he wondered when the cold point of the *kinjal* might enter his body, with a jerk of the runners.

After a long, torturous ride, the captives saw an underground hall with doors in its

four corners. Its walls were covered with hieroglyphics carved in black marble inlaid with gold.

Those golden letters, twisted and curled like insects, seemed alive and moving in the wavering light of the torches. At a given signal, the guards released their charges. They felt so tired and thirsty after that gruesome journey, that they eagerly accepted the aromatic drink proffered to them in beautifully carved vessels. The effect of that drink was stupefying; they both fell instantly asleep.

When they woke up, weak and dizzy, they found themselves in another cave, decorated with flowers and fragrant with dried herbs. A jubilant crowd of Parsees surrounded them. They were given some wine which lent them temporary strength, but made their senses reel. Everything seemed a nightmare.

They were led toward a door adorned with the emblem of a golden star. The star had wings, and in the middle of its rays there was carved the beautiful face of a maiden. Looking at it, Collins thought desperately about Mariette being prepared for the coming sacrifice.

He saw her now. She was sitting on a high stool reminding one of a pedestal, all clothed in white. Her face was as pale as an alabaster statue. Next to her sat her friend, Tamara, the olive skinned Armenian whose dark Oriental beauty was an enchanting contrast.

"Mariette!" Collins cried with agony.

"I've prayed for this," she said, and the resonant echo of the underground hall repeated her words:

"—prayed for this." It was as if the unseen angels watching over his beloved had sung those words out of the ether.

Tamara smiled palely at the newcomers, then grew grave again, as they heard the booming of a gong.

Startled, they looked in the direction of the sound and saw a door swing open on grating hinges. The sight behind that door made them gasp.

A fountain of fire spurted from a hole in the ground. Two gigantic skivers were laid across it, supported by enormous andirons shaped as lean winged lions. The skivers were white hot.

"Your bridal bed!" the leader said to the girls, in his slow, precise Russian. "You will be honored by the love of the Flaming Gods."

Tamara, who understood the words, blanched white under her sunburn. But Mariette did not understand.

"What did he say?" she asked Collins.

Instead of an answer, he grabbed her in his arms and dashed madly toward the exit. The Parsees sprang after him. A brief fight followed, in which Willoughby's long legs played no small rôle. Unarmed, he kicked and banged his fists right and left, while Collins tried to ward off the blows directed at Mariette.

Tamara, child of the inscrutable Caucasus, did not lose for a moment her fatalistic Oriental poise. She stood apart from the fighting men, her hands moving repeatedly and rhythmically in the broad sign of the cross, her lips forming a silent prayer.

The uneven fight was soon over. Bruised, scratched by the short, sharp weapons of the Parsees who could bleed an enemy to death without delivering a mortal blow, Collins and Willoughby were once more captured, and this time tied with thongs.

A trap door opened in the ceiling. Descending slowly, a platform-like contraption carried a white-bearded man with wild eyes and twisting mouth. He chanted a moan-like prayer, as other Parsees whispered to each other:

"Our high priest is possessed by the Deity!"

The four captives could not understand the gibberish which the priest uttered but they guessed its ominous meaning as the muscular, half-naked servants approached the girls.

At that moment the fiery mountain flickered as if swayed by a sudden draft. Its

flame diminished, became a thin spear. The Parsees started uneasily.

"Flaming Gods are angry!" they whispered.

The servants paused with the girls struggling violently in their arms. In that moment of impotent indignation, Collins understood what the Parsees meant by torture of the soul.

Prayers were chanted, incense was burned, and the Flaming Gods seemed to brighten again. The flame shot higher, still higher. Now it almost licked the vaulted ceiling of the temple. Collins exclaimed:

"Look, Willoughby, look!"

"It looks like a lamp about to go out," Willoughby said agitatedly, afraid to believe his hope.

The fire flickered rapidly, its color changing through all the shades of yellow and smoky red to pale blue.

"It's dying out!" cried Collins.

The fire flickered again, then subsided, shrank, grew pale. The Parsees shouted in a frenzy of fear:

"Flaming Gods are angry! They refuse the sacrifice!"

The fire flickered once more, and died out. Suffocating smell filled the temple, making people faint. In that moment of general confusion, the Armenian girl's supreme presence of mind asserted itself. She snatched a short *kinjal* from the hands of a trembling servant and with a few deft strokes cut the bonds tying Willoughby's hands.

"Thank you, beautiful!" He took the *kinjal* from her exhausted hands and dashed toward Collins.

Freed, Collins stretched his hands above his head, then swung them down, until the blood surged again in the muscles which had gone asleep. Then he rushed toward the dark corner from which there came sounds of frightened weeping. As his arms enfolded Mariette, the girl clung to him and her sobbing ceased.

Willoughby grabbed Tamara, and both men ran out of the inner temple before the bewildered Parsees could stop them.

Stumbling along the uneven ground of the slippery passage, they ran madly up its rising slope, listening for the sound of pursuers' feet. Instead they heard the sound of heavy marching steps ahead.

"It—it sounds like soldiers marching!" Collins gasped, almost out of breath.

They stopped to rest from their fair burdens. The girls slipped out of their arms, once more demure and embarrassed by the nearness of the men to whom they had clung in the moment of danger. In that brief time of waiting for the approaching rescuers their eyes confessed what their lips would not utter.

The sound of marching feet grew louder. Anxious voices called:

"Captain Collins! Lieutenant Willoughby! Are you there?"

With a surge of joy the friends recognized Batavin's voice.

In a few moments they were surrounded by tall Georgian soldiers in ragged uniforms, with their belts adorned with beaten gold from which hung *kinjals* in silver filigree scabbards. They grinned and talked all at once, their sugar-white teeth gleaming under their dark mustaches, the lanterns they carried throwing their strong lean, bronzed faces in sharp relief.

The runaways were triumphantly carried out of the underground passage, into the fresh mountain air, with stars shining in the clear evening sky. They saw with amazement a great pillar of flame burning just outside the gate, like a flaming sentinel.

"It's the Flaming God," explained Batavin. "Now that we've got it, I wonder how we are going to put it to work. The darned thing self-ignited itself! I suppose we'll have to build a furnace around it. Quite a problem."

But neither Collins nor Willoughby were interested in any engineering problem, being too absorbed in the lovely girls walking by their sides. Batavin led the procession,

smiling and stroking his short blond beard, as he explained:

"I hid myself in the cellar the day those tribesmen came. I decided that a live coward was better than a dead fool. There I waited until they were gone. But they did not get what they were after; I have had no time to count the damage yet, but it looks to me as if they hardly stole any bullets. You see, I directed a lava of molten metal at them, and they were positively terrified; they must have thought it was our dead mountain volcano coming to life again. For a while, I saw nothing but the soles of their boots."

"How on earth did you do it?"

"That lava trick? A connection from the cellar with the ore smelting furnace. A secret underground passage. It's too complicated to explain. Soon after the tribesmen were gone, our regiment returned. So I put those gallant men to work digging out the tunnel, after they dug a common grave for the poisoned miners."

After a moment of sad recollection, he continued:

"We would not venture going to the temple through that crooked underground passage—the Parsees might have burned you if we stormed the place. We decided to prevent the fire sacrifice—that was why we started to clear out that old tunnel. It was a long job. Only a few of the Georgians know sapper's work, which was why it took us so long to get through. We had to go slow, especially for the last few yards, the gas seeped through and the men had to wear gas masks, until we diverted the Flaming Gods away from the temple."

IV

THE great dining hall of the castle, with its walls lined with wooden boxes full of bullets, changed once more from a factory storehouse into the banquet hall. The cold stone floor of checkered black and white marble, cracked by time and weather, was hastily covered with sheepskins which had to serve as rugs. The director had ordered Ivan to clean his collection of silver framed drinking horns and they now stood on the long refractory table, their highly polished fittings gleaming in the light of the cavernous fireplace full of blazing logs. The odor of tallow candles was offset by the delicious smell of venison and broiled lamb spiced with herbs and garnished with red pepper. While the men drank wine, the ladies were served with *chekme,* little fluffy cakes filled with nuts.

The zurnas were strumming, the young boys impersonating girls were dancing coyly around the table, and the guests clapped their hands rythmically—in accompaniment to the music. Mariette Reading, still in the gold-hemmed sacrificial robe, sat next to Collins looking at him with glowing eyes, while Tamara danced in the middle of the table, blushing happily under the adoring gaze of her lieutenant.

The feast was in full swing, when a sorry figure entered the dining hall. It was Vaska, who had just recovered from an orgy of sleep, his favorite pastime. His eyelids were swollen, his face dull. But his words betrayed unlooked for intelligence:

"*Barin,* I must remind you that your leave expires tonight."

"How's that for watchfulness, eh? Vaska, you're a gem among orderlies! Well, Willoughby, I guess we must go. Let's drink for the last time to the ladies!"

The girls answered the toast, drinking the juice freshly pressed from the muscat grapes, and promised once more that they would wait for their beloved warriors until the war ended. They were to be conveyed to Baku next morning, in a comfortable carriage, with Batavin's housekeeper as a chaperon.

Sighing rather sadly, Collins and Willoughby went out into the chilly fresh air, and mounted their hastily saddled horses lent to them by the Georgian officers. Vaska followed them far behind on a mule. A shepherd dog which had recently adopted

him in gratitude for many bones, ran at a respectful distance from the mule's heels.

"Being once more on horseback reminds me that we will have to pay, after all, for those starvelings killed by the Parsees," Collins said, patting the neck of the strong Arabian half-breed he was riding. "That Calmuk we hired them from will soak us many American dollars. We have no luck!"

"Never mind, fellow. Let's hope your dream will come true and it will be back home to our respective countries pretty soon."

"Soon—" Collins repeated, gently spurring his horse.

"Well, we had a red-hot furlough!" the lieutenant summed up all that had happened during those frantic three days.

But their red-hot furlough was not destined to end yet. As they neared the White Devil's Pass, they saw a caravan of dwarfish Caucasian donkeys passing in the valley below. Their thin shaggy bodies looked shapeless in the uncertain light of the rising moon. They swayed on their thin legs as if under a burden too heavy for their strength. Their elongated shadows reflected on the chalk-white road, with their unnaturally long ears and the humps of packages strapped to their backs, looked like the ghosts of some weird beasts from Apocalypsus.

Willoughby noticed them first and called Collins attention to the night caravan.

"They are going toward the Caspian sea. A strange time of the year for a merchant's caravan."

As Collins looked at the slowly moving animals, his mobile face expressed sudden anger.

"These are not merchants' donkeys. Those small heavy packages they carry—yes, it must be lead. Look!"

One of the donkeys, exhausted by its burden, stumbled along the bumpy road and his thin tottering legs broke as if they were dry sticks. Another fell as quickly.

The caravan stopped. The drivers beat the fallen animals with their *knouts* on long sticks looking like fishing poles. But no amount of beating could lift the poor beasts to their feet; they were dying.

"Only savage tribes would use those weak little donkeys to carry ammunition. Those must be the men who attacked us. Turn back your horse, Willoughby, we must return and take charge of the Georgian regiment. I hope the soldiers are not too drunk to fight."

His fingers felt in his breast pocket for the precious document authorizing him to take command of the Georgians. He congratulated himself for having left it in safe hands before his capture.

The Irish in him rejoiced at the prospect of getting even with those fierce tribesmen whose bows and spears he recognized

strapped to their shoulders, over the ample black capes. They looked like gigantic birds of prey with contorted wings.

"Frankly, I'm not particularly anxious to fight those black hawks," said Willoughby. "But if we must; we can't very well let them carry away those contraband bullets."

When they returned to the mines they had no difficulty in persuading the courageous Georgians to start a chase after the tribesmen. They found them still in the banquet hall. The girls had retired, and the feast was growing more noisy and hilarious every moment. But a battle is just as much joy for a Georgian as a feast; fairly warmed by wine, by no means drunk, those strong-headed warriors buckled on their long sabers, and mounted their horses with wild battle cries. Galloping at a neck-breaking speed, they overtook the sneaking

caravan when the moon was at its zenith.

What followed seemed to Collins a dream from the thousand and one nights. Leading those fiercely brave riders was like being hoisted on the crest of the ninth wave. He felt the joint courage of the whole regiment centered in him, as he flashed a long Russian saber in close-up fighting with the predatory enemy.

Overtaken suddenly, the tribesmen had no time to use their clumsy spears and bows. Instead, they fought with short crooked *kinjals,* throwing them at the enemy when they went too far to engage in hand to hand fighting. With awed wonder, Collins saw that those curved *kinjals* acted as boomerangs, hurling his men down the mountain slope.

Yet the oncoming living wave of Georgians could not be stopped. Infuriated by a few deaths on their side, they attacked the enemy with fierce cries, striking horror into the hearts of the mountaineers. The Georgian leader who fought at Collins side, horse to horse, started singing a weird chant, an incantation intended to bring evil forces upon his enemies. Other Georgians joined in that mournful, wailing song. It was the unnerving influence of that chant as well as the attack itself which made the enemy turn their backs and run for dear life.

The victorious Georgians herded the donkeys which stood paralyzed with fear under the overhanging rock, trying to crowd all into the shallow cave carved in it by the centuries of rain and melting snow. It was Vaska who had kept the animals from stampeding, with the help of his new dog.

Collins ordered his soldiers to relieve the donkeys from a part of their burden and to redistribute the recovered bullets between the horses which had more strength to carry them. To be sure, the Georgians felt insulted seeing their proud steeds turned into beasts of burden, but they had to obey their temporary commander.

"It makes me sick at the stomach to see those little donkeys break their legs," Collins confessed shamefacedly to his friend.

On foot, the regiment reached the mines. The moon had set, the fog from the mountains blotted out the stars and the inky darkness enveloped the settlement. But none slept there, anxiously awaiting the outcome of the expedition.

As Collins groped through the gate, a white shadow detached itself from the gate house and the dear voice which he had saved from being silenced forever cried out:

"You came back to me, beloved!"

As the warm arms clung to his neck, he forgot all about the dangers lurking in the mysterious mountains of Caucasus.

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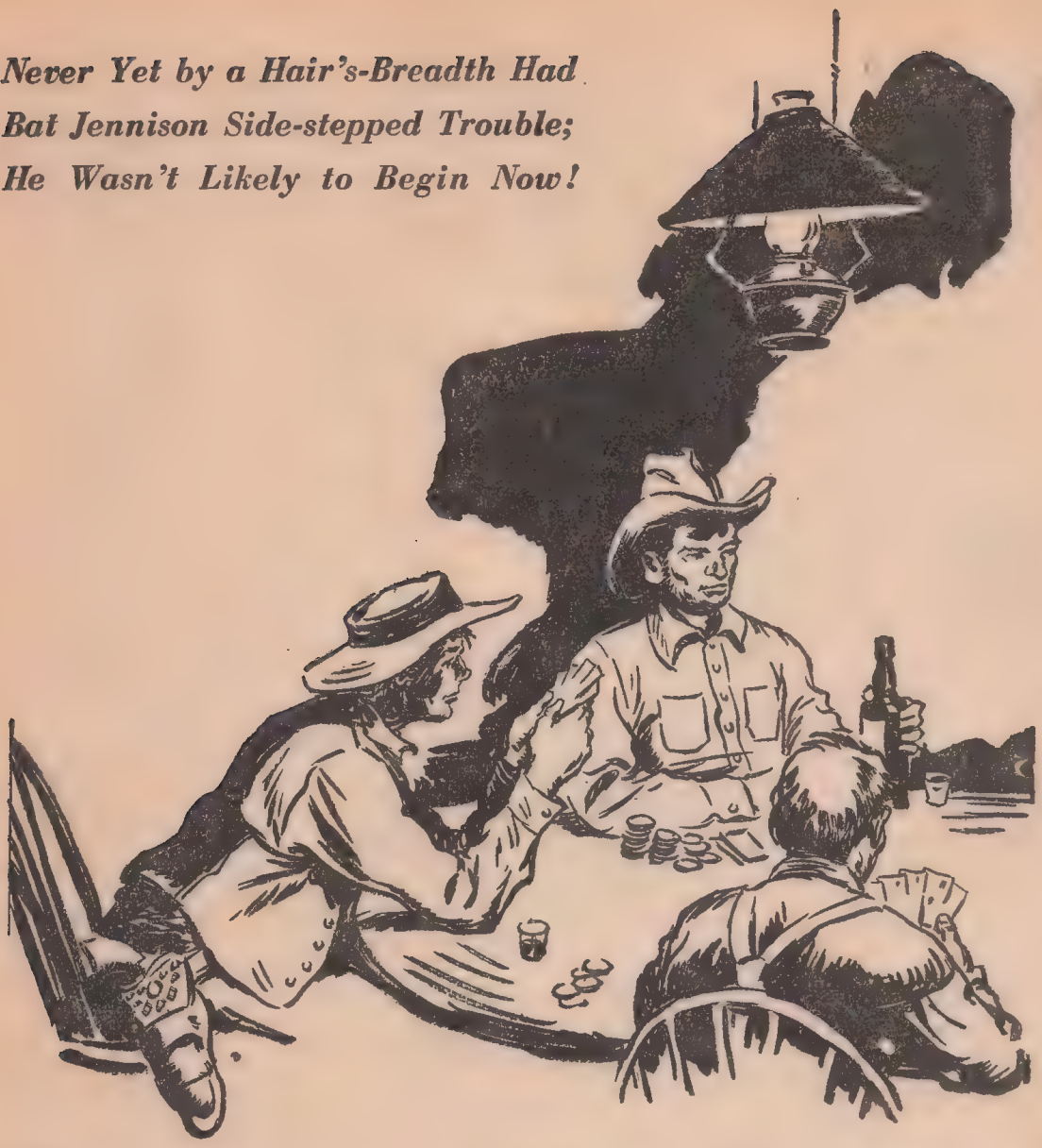
HE WHO DIES **By FREDERICK C. PAINTON**

in SHORT STORIES for April 10th

Never Yet by a Hair's-Breadth Had Bat Jennison Side-stepped Trouble; He Wasn't Likely to Begin Now!



THE CROOK OF AN EYEBROW

By GEORGE BRUCE MARQUIS

Author of "Power of a Name" and Other Stories of Bat Jennison

AT THE first nerve-jangling squeak, Jennison set down his glass. At the second, he was already at the door. For he read the signs and and portents in those twin whistling shrieks. The first was promise and immediate fulfillment of attack. The second defiance, and instant acceptance of the challenge. What horse had issued the first he did not know, but the horse that had so cordially picked up the gauntlet of battle was his own pony, Sunflower. A stout heart, had his beloved buckskin and a generous one. Never the aggressor, yet never by a hair's breadth side-stepping trouble, he was an equine counterpart of his master.

In their years of closest companionship, perhaps one had learned from the other.

By the time Jennison reached the street, the initial assault had been handsomely repulsed and Sunflower was counter attacking with vigor. The big rawboned sorrel who evidently was the leader of the forlorn hope, was being plastered with Sunflower's steel shod heels as Jennison appeared, with a smashed stirrup to prove it to his master. The sorrel evidently would have retired from the field of carnage, but his heaving weight had not been sufficient to dislodge a big black horse immediately to his right, though he was levering sidewise with every ounce of poundage when Jennison arrived to stop the one-sided conflict. Picking up the dangling bridle reins, he drew Sunflower aside. And as was Jennison's way, he chided him in words, though his tones carried praise rather than blame.

"And I'm sure ashamed of you," he reproached his pony. "Fightin' jest like you was trash, after the careful raisin' I've give you."

Then he stopped. He had noted Sunflower's mangled ear, and that they were to entertain stern eyed justice.

Four men had emerged from a saloon a half dozen doors down the street, and were pushing purposefully for the scene of the interrupted combat. It required no expert eye to report that they were hard men. And the big man in the van by two strides, was orating in tones fit for a sailing mate hailing the masthead in a spanking breeze.

"No damned sway-backed *cayuse* can kick *my* horse around and live to tell his sheep herding owner about——"

Oration and orator halted there, progress and threat pinched off by the same plucking fingers. One moment Jennison had stood there, empty handed, the next split second saw his left hand filled with the butt of a Colt's forty-five, whose muzzle lined neatly to the belt buckle riding the big man's protuberant front.

"Blabber mouth," Jennison advised coldly, "you should oughta keep that fly trap shut. Open, she hides everything between your Adam's apple and your hat band, 'ceptin' your fuzzy eyebrows."

The other blinked dazedly, for the shifting panorama had been a bit too swift for his torpid mind. Then he became awkwardly aware that this lightning gun artist expected something from him, in fact that he might not wait indefinitely for either actions or words. Belligerent actions seemed barred, so he had recourse to fumbling words.

"I've been drinking heavy," he said lamely, "and I bet I talked too much. In fact I know it now. As for my horse, he's a damned quarrelsome critter and undoubtedly started the shindy with your pony. I hope he got his needin's."

"Let it set thar," Jennison nodded as he dropped his pistol back into its holster. "Round's about even, I reckon. Your hoss gotta busted stirrup and Sunflower's gotta peeled ear. Both'll mend."

The evidence was all in and that case was closed, but a companion of the big man now intruded an off trail remark. Like Jennison he was a small man with sharp darting eyes and the certified look of a well seasoned traveler. What he said was in the nature of a half question.

"Stranger," he stated, "I've wandered hither and yon considerable, but I never yet saw a man get a gun out as greased lightning fast as you did. I thought I was watching reasonable close, but still I didn't quite catch it."

"I was carrying it in my fist likely," Jennison said dryly. "It's a kinda habit of mine, damned unuseless habit, but still a habit."

"I'd believe it as told," the other grinned, "only your left holster was wiggling like you'd drawed from there. Of course, maybe I just imagined it was wiggling."

"You sure musta," Jennison nodded, "if I had my gun in my fist."

"It's a slick draw, anyway," the man conceded. "And you've got a slick pony

there, too. Near a dead ringer for mine," and he jerked a proud thumb toward the fourth in their row of horses. Then he continued. "They're like nearly as two peas. Fifty yards away, unsaddled, and even I'd be put to it to tell them apart."

Jennison squinted critically at the near duplicate horse, then assessed their divergent points aloud.

"Your hoss'll weigh forty pounds more'n Sunflower," he distinguished, "but as you say, they're most uncommon alike. Still and but, thar's a diffrunce in the hold of their heads, and the perk of their ears. I'll say this, however. If your hoss is half as good a pony as Sunflower is, nobody could buy him offen you, even if you was starvin'."

Loyalty to a tried companion at its ultimate peak. The other man nodded his understanding and there was like pride reflected in his words as he said, "Buttercup —he's a he spite of his name, is everything you've guessed. He's not in the market, at any price."

A MAN carrying a double-barreled shotgun came lumbering round a corner, the shimmer on his vest sealed testimony of his office. The star had been home wrought, its edges incised irregularly with successive bites of the cold chisel. Yet these homely badges of small-town marshals imbibed a certain dignity from the wearers. In those remote corners of the primitive West these humble men performed mightily for law and justice. Often unpaid they were, and often rewarded with a lead ace. Now the man with the star plowed to a stop and glared about.

"What's the row?" he puffed. "I heard a gun fight was in the making and aim to stop it. Shuck," he addressed the self-announced master of Sunflower's mate, "I've warned you already. You men ain't welcome here."

Before the man called Shuck could answer, Jennison had taken up the rôle of pacificator.

"Somebody's been funnin' you, Marshal," he said genially. "Thar ain't been even a faint whisper of trouble, 'ceptin' two hosses was scufflin' a little. But you cain't arrest hosses, now can you?" And he smiled disarmingly. The marshal did not seem entirely persuaded. And he bent an eye full of suspicion on Shuck and his crowd as he insisted.

"Somebody said Moon there," and the owner of the sorrel was clearly indicated, "was threatening murder and sudden death to somebody."

For reasons not then clear to himself, Jennison took up verbal cudgels for Moon.

"I've been here all the time," he asserted, "and if any noises like that had issued frum his organs of speech, I'd a sure heard 'em."

"Why a sink hole like this needs a marshal," Moon bellowed, "is clean by me. And as for you and your tin badge, let me tell you——"

Whatever further reverse compliments he had in stock were never jettisoned. Shuck had stepped one swift pace and slapped the big man sharply across his wide mouth.

What words made hissing accompaniment to the resounding blow, Jennison could not hear, but that the combination was efficacious needed no added proof. Without protest, Moon turned meekly and followed his companions back into the saloon. What Jennison had not heard was this:

"About two more yaps and you'll talk yourself into a coffin."

Inside the saloon, Moon swung about to bluster, "What did you mean, Dan, by what you just said? I could down both of 'em single-handed."

"You're a damned big bellied, big mouthed youngen," Shuck said witheringly. "That cool, soft talking stranger could mow down a dozen beginners like you. If you'd a even *fingered* your gun, you'd a become ain't in a damned big hurry. I've got a notion he's Bat Jennison. Well, you've

heard of *him*. How much chance do you figger you have with Bat Jennison?"

"My God!" Moon gurgled. "Do you reckon that is Jennison? I thought he was in Pannikan City. That's what we heard."

"That man Jennison," Shuck asserted bitterly, "is always where men busy like us don't need him. We sure don't need him, so I figger it's him."

WHEN the four had moved off, Jennison turned to the marshal with a query.

"Where's a feed corral, if any?"

"Down the street and across the corner," the marshal gestured. "It just so happens that I'm the ramrod."

"Well," Jennison grinned, "I reckon this marshalin' business don't take moren half your time. Also have you high grade fodder fur a higher grade pony?"

"I've got prime blue joint hay," the marshal answered the question in reverse. "And counting out this Dan Shuck gang, being marshal is about as much work as the pay I get."

"Which said pay likely don't make you hump shouldered to carry," Jennison nodded. "Now 'spose you lead me and Sunflower to that preordained blue jint hay. Mebby you've got some axle grease also which I can smear onto his ear. That's healin' salve and 'll keep off dirt and flies, besides."

"None better," the marshal conceded, "and I've got it."

As they trudged off down the dusty street, Jennison glanced at the marshal's shotgun.

"Brother," said he, "if I was you, the next time I'd sure have my gun cocked when I talked battle with hard people, fur they are hard people."

"I reckon that's probably so," the other agreed slowly. "For as you say, they're hard people."

"Thar ain't no probable about the shotgun," Jennison said flatly. "Men like Shuck could make you into a colander before you could even start to cock it. I've toddled about some and considerable and I know. What's their business, if any?"

"I'd admire to know that myself," the marshal admitted. "They've been holing up here more or less for a week now. Camped just below town and not always at their camp. They give out that they're cowpunchers."

"White hands like they've got," Jennison diagnosed shrewdly, "ain't come at by swingin' lariats and handlin' brandin' irons. I'm bettin' them gents ain't et their daily beans per hard work."

"That's what I think," the marshal agreed, "but I can't prove it."

"I wouldn't try," Jennison advised. "They'll probably prove it themselves some of these days."

The marshal glanced sharply at the little man, but got nothing for his glance. If

a covert warning was implied, Jennison did not at that moment choose to expand it. Instead he asked a question.

"How comes it," he chuckled, "that this town admits to the name of Everless? Most places pick soundier name pegs than that."

"Everless fits this town like a new boot," the marshal smiled, "for it's shrinking every day. Down to fifty now, and by to-

morrow, if there's forty I'll be surprised. All that keeps it going are a few hay farmers scattered up and down the crick and a couple of small cattle ranches up on the ridges. But it was different at first. When old Sam Trace struck pay dirt just above town, it seen a big rush. A thousand men clawed the gizzard out of the placer gravels and this camp howled like a wild wolf. But Lordy! In six months it was played out, and most of the miners skedaddled over to Joy Bells on Plank Crick. Only a matter of a dozen miles at the longest. And Joy Bells is sure ringing twenty-four hours a day. A couple of thousand men there right now, wallowing in riches and sin."

"Should think that 'ud be green pastures fur Shuck and his gang," Jennison considered. "They don't fit into the chromo here. But how'd they pick a disrespectful name like Everless?"

"They didn't," the marshal answered. "That name was hitched on following its downfall. The original name was Evermore. Old Sam Trace named it so. Sam was kinda educated which showed up, especially when he was comfortable drunk. As I heard him tell it, a man named Poe wrote a ditty about a crow which come into his place one night and went to roost on a statue of a feller named Dallas. When Poe tried to shoo him outside, the crow wouldn't budge, but set there saying 'Evermore.' Sam figgered it a good name for the camp."

Jennison promptly set the imprimatur of his literary ignorance on the misquotation.

"Trace was right," he stated judicially, "I've heered Doc Levitt say it, and what Doc said was correct. Yet I've gotta admit that the latterly gent who changed it to Everless was sure expired same as the prophets of old."

BY NOW Sunflower had been stripped of his impedimenta, his ear garnished with axle grease sufficient to have serviced a freight wagon and this indignity palliated with enough blue joint hay to have gladdened the heart of an elephant.

"Hosses ain't much diffrunt frum humans," Jennison philosophized. "They git mad moren seldom when you're bent on doin' 'em good and then you can bribe 'em into sweetness like you can a youngen with a sugar tit."

"That's so," the marshal chimed in. "Double so with a man if a woman's doing the bribing."

"I don't know much about females," Jennison admitted unabashed. "But I do savvy hosses."

"You and me both as to horses," the marshal said companionably. Then he side passed the question of ladies to ask, "Where are you bedding down for the night? I see you've got your bedroll along."

"Right thar," Jennison thumbed a low butt of blue joint hay, "should you have no objections."

"You're welcome to squat there," the marshal told him heartily. "And that hay is fresh as a daisy."

The stock butt was a yard high, perhaps twice as wide and a bit longer still. It occupied a tight pole pen in the center of the corral itself. Jennison tossed his bedroll over the top pole where it wriggled to rest on the fragrant hay. Later it would be unreefed into the semblance of a bed, but that incident could wait. And because Jennison had come to Everless for a purpose, he now asked a question.

"Do you happen to know a man named Scrimp Manning?"

"I sure do," the marshal smiled. "A half-pint size with a voice like Gabriel's trumpet and with nerve equal to his voice. You bet I know Scrimp."

"You've drawed per word of mouth," Jennison grinned, "the livin', spittin' image of Scrimp. A hundred pounds of sand and friendship, wrapped around a voice like a buffalo bull's. Where'll I find him?"

"He runs a little cow ranch with a pardner named Sam Noonen," the other in-

formed him. "It sets up on the flat spread between this canyon and Plank Crick. Just about the same distance from Joy Bells as it is from this place. You ride down this canyon about four miles and hump up over the ridge. There's a trail that takes you smack to their house. Turn at a big white rock. And anyway, it's the only plain trail."

"Seen Scrimp lately?"

"Since you mention it, I ain't. Scrimp comes here, Noonen goes to Joy Bells. Generally I see Scrimp every day or so, but I ain't seen him for a week, probably longer."

"Mebby he's committed matrimony," Jennison chuckled. "Anyway, I'll look into it. And since I may rack out before you git up in the morning, I'd best pay you fur my hoss and bedroom right now. And where's a good place to eat?"

"In Chicago maybe," the marshal guessed, "but not here. Still if you ain't too particular, Tom Duke 'ill feed you in that half tent yonder."

PLANK walled up for six feet, the alleged restaurant was topped with dingy canvas, smoked to a soot blackness underneath from much frying on a four lidded sheet iron stove. It displayed two small tables, decked with frayed, unlaundered oilcloth, flanked by low rough benches. Not a place for a fastidious person, but then Jennison was not fastidious. Duke was chef, waiter, owner and swamper, all combined, a thin stoop-shouldered gray bearded-man with twinkling eyes, and genial smile. At the moment Duke was the second person in the room, if Jennison be counted first.

"I want aigs," Jennison announced as he sat down. "Six fried, also turned over."

"The prairie chickens has quit layin'," Duke asserted, "consequent I'm plum out of hen fruit. How'll canned salmon do?"

"I see it in your eye," Jennison pursued, "that hummin' bird aigs is also minus. Therefore, I'll take three slices of ham, fried clear through."

"I ain't got ham," Duke enumerated patiently. "How 'ill you take your canned salmon, cold or hot?"

"I like my roast beef with mashed potaters," Jennison announced gustily, "but if you ain't got mashed potaters, I'll take 'em fried."

"I've got two cans of salmon," Duke inventoried. "Want 'em both or will one be enough?"

"What I've been wonderin' about," Jennison opined, "is why I don't git my salmon. And what do I smell that's trapped up in that thar stove?"

"Them's sour dough biscuits you're sniffin'," Duke appraised the odor with pride. "Besides, I've got a brand new prune pie and honest to goodness coffee. How does that fit you?"

"Barrin' ham and aigs," and Jennison lingered on the thought, "sour dough buscuits, flanked with prune pie and a quart or two of real coffee is food fitten fur any man. Trot out the toot assemble, as the poet says, and don't forgit the salmon."

With the food on the table, Duke drew up a bench and continued the conversation. In sober truth, it took on the pattern of a monologue, for when Jennison ate, he ate.

"This is my final night in this town," Duke stated with every evidence of pleasure. "Me and that saloon keeper up at the end of the street are moving over to Joy Bells tomorrow morning. He's sold out and so am I. I ain't even taking my stove. That Shuck gang shot holes in its yesterday, maybe you've noticed 'em and the canvas ain't worth tearin' off. Yep, I've done with this damned camp and that's a fact."

Jennison battled down a biscuit with a slug of hot coffee and then queried the reason for the assault on the stove.

"Why," Duke explained indignantly, "they wanted fried oysters and swung next to stewed lamb pie and apple fritters. Drawing blanks on that kind of grub, they shot up the joint."

When Jennison left the restaurant, the sun was setting, with only a half of its burnished disk showing above the western rim of the valley. By the time he had reached the feed corral that half had disappeared.

BESIDE the corral gate was a section of log a yard long, a third as thick. Jennison sat down on the handy seat and lighted his pipe and with the corral for a back rest watched the small world snail by. Duke's restaurant was already dark, likewise the saloon where a few hours before Jennison had abandoned a half glass of whiskey. One building, however, showed lights, the saloon from which Shuck and his crowd had marched that same afternoon. And because Jennison wanted a drink and for another reason, he set out for this lone thirst emporium in Everless.

The owner-bartender was behind the low counter, with Shuck and his three stringing along its brief length. Rather effusively for Westerners, they greeted Jennison and invited him to a drink. Downed in what moderns would dub uncultured haste, the amenities decreed an immediate return engagement, with Jennison now as host. With this second drink in hand, Shuck made a friendly suggestion.

"Let's sit down at that table," he pointed. "We're short on news from the outside, and if you've any that's recent, we'll be mighty glad to hear it."

"I don't know any new news," Jennison replied, "but settin' down is a good remark, anyway."

The table was decrepit, the chairs rickety, but with care they managed. And now Shuck had another thought.

"I don't believe we know each other," he stated. "I'm Dan Shuck, Blabbermouth, as you called him a rightly this afternoon, is Tom Moon. This black no good is Sim Jones and this other's Paul Rapp."

"My name-peg's easy on the remembrance," Jennison bridged the pause that had fallen after the roll call, "it's John Smith."

"You the feller," Moon grinned wisely, "who saved Polkahauntus?"

"I ain't the man," Jennison answered. "Also, whilst I ain't much up on history, it was considerable before my time."

"Two hundred and fifty years," Shuck added, "but to a natural damn fool like Tom, that's nothing. Any news, Mr. Smith?"

"Not much recenter than the Mexican war," Jennison admitted blandly. "Don't this town furnish no news?"

"This town," Shuck asserted sourly, "don't furnish anything but disappointments. We've been here for four or five days looking for a job. They told us down in Oregon that they had doodles of cattle here, so we rode two hundred miles to find out that they lied. Hell!" he spat disgustedly, "a man with a wooden leg could herd all the cattle within a hundred miles of this damned dead-fall. We're moving on tomorrow."

"I rode over from Nevada way on account of the placer mines," Jennison fabricated, "and frum the signs the mines and cow brutes measure up both minus. I figger I'll be movin' on myself, tomorrow."

"We didn't find a job," Shuck reminisced, "but I did run into something funny. Out here on one ranch I met a little man, say a hundred pounds scant, with a voice like a fog horn. Name was—let's see—Manning. *Scrimp,* his partner called him. You should hear him holler." And he looked at Jennison keenly.

"I'm new come here," Jennison told them. "I ain't had no time to look up no fog horns."

"I didn't see this Manning," Sim Jones put in, "but I bet he cain't beller like Old Whispering Thompson. Two hundred-fifty pounds of solid noise. Hear him two or three miles when he's warmed up."

Again a pause while the four watched Jennison for effects. But vainly. They were but bungling amateurs dealing with a past master in the gentle art of deception.

"Never heered of this said Thompson,"

he admitted, "but then as I've done told you, I just rode in frum Nevada. Big you say. Well, as a genrul rule big men have voices like tin whistles. It's runts like Manning, who tote the bass drums in their bosoms, so to speak."

Eluded here, Shuck tried one more tack.

"How about a little game of stud?" he suggested alluringly. "Just a friendly game to pass the time."

Jennison shook his head as he turned his back resolutely upon his favorite game.

"I usta play checkers fur money," he confessed, "but seein' the evils of gamblin' around me, I swore off. Never knowin' card games, I figger I'm too old to learn 'em now." He yawned prodigiously, then got to his feet. "Reckon I'll ramble on," he told them, "Spreading my blankets onto a butt of blue jint hay over at the feed corral. Smelliest bed I've had in a coon's age. Glad to a met you boys. So long."

THEY gave him scant *adieus* and on his part he watched them carefully in the small-bar mirror till he had left the room. Clear of the light, his laggard pace quickened and doubling back along the saloon wall, he halted where a misfitted log furnished him a handy listening post. The four were still at the table, so close that with a straw a foot long he could have tickled Moon's flappy ear. Had he felt playful and possessed the straw. As Jennison anticipated, he was the subject of their low-voiced conversation, for as he bent his ear to the friendly crack, Sim Jones was saying.

"And he'd *never* heard of Whispering Thompson and *never* played stud poker!"

"Which just goes to show you," Rapp analyzed the evidence, "how damned dangerous Jennison is."

"He lied for a reason," Shuck said thoughtfully, "I wish I knew exactly why." He appeared to consider for a few moments while his followers waited. "Anyway," he proceeded to emphasize the comforting thought," we know *where* he is."

Now he looked at his watch and there was the sound of a scraping chair. "I've got to be in Joy Bells by one o'clock," he announced briskly, "and I'm taking Sim with me."

"Don't we go along," the scandalized query was from Tom Moon.

"No. You and Paul will come over tomorrow. And I don't want you there either before dark. I've got something for you to do which I'll tell you about on our way to camp. Let's mosey."

By one o'clock an old moon had inched up over the canyon wall to illuminate dimly the decrepit remnants of the once vigorous town. The low shed where Sunflower vacationed was a gray blob against a grayer background, but the pole corral and its inner diminutive mate housing the butt of hay, lay semi-revealed in its dull puddle of yellow moonlight. A string a dozen yards in length could have spanned the space between their top rails.

A man detached himself from the shadows and crept warily up to the corral. Now from between the top rail and its nearest neighbor he studied the inner corral long and carefully. He noted the blanket-cased figure, saw that the head end pointed correctly for his convenience and observed with a coarse grin the Stetson swinging from one of the uprights. Everything was exactly as it should be, and he nodded approvingly as he shuffled away. He did not go far. Across the road and a few steps nearer the saloon loomed the walls of a fire-gutted cabin with enough height left to hide a standing man. To this man the scout reported briefly and outlined a simple plan of campaign.

"He's there all right," he whispered jubilantly. "Got his head toggled up in a bandanna. Kinda dark there, but light enough at that. We can't miss him. Got your rifle cocked? That's right. We'll sneak up careful, draw a bead over the top rail and when I nudge you, we'll shoot together. *Then* we'll give him another round for good measure and fade."

Without accident, the pair reached the corral and laid their rifles across the top pole. The moon was a little higher, the light a little better than when the leader of the two first stood there. As he drew a bead on the handkerchief-draped knob, he wondered vaguely if Jennison were bald. His companion seemed set, the monitory nudge was given, the rifles roared as one. Rapidly each jacked out the spent cartridge, levered in a second and fired again. Tarrying only long enough to observe certain satisfying twitching under the blankets, the two flitted down the dusty street and were lost in the shadows.

Jennison emerged from the shed holding in his hand one end of the lariat with which he had so obligingly contrived the dying shudders. Now he reefed it up as he walked over to the hay butt, deftly slipped the noose from the section of log that had occupied his blankets, unknotted the lacerated neckerchief and clamped his Stetson on his head. Kicking the log aside, he rolled up his blankets and returned with them to the shed. Now he lighted his pipe and sitting down on his bedroll gave range to his thoughts.

Just why Dan Shuck determined to eliminate him, he did not know. He had never met any of them before, nor heard of them even, for that matter. The crux of the thing, however, was that they had heard of him. To Jennison, it was crystal clear that they were not in this neck of the woods for their health. Knowing of him, it suited their plans to forestall any possible interference on his part. By their acts, they had made that potential interference imperative.

Yet for the moment, it pleased him to lull their false security. He knew that Shuck and one of his men had already left for Joy Bells and that the pair who had made the attempt on his life would not follow until the next evening. He knew where this pair were camped down the creek just clear of the town. The road to Joy Bells led that way and it was also the road to Scrimp Manning's ranch. He judged that the two were already in their blankets probably asleep. Men of their sort found crime a notable antidote for insomnia.

Twenty minutes later, he rode out of town. A hundred yards beyond the last suggestion of a house, a whiff from a slumbering fire informed him of the proximity of the Shuck camp. He accordingly left the road and swung a half circle from the trail. He had no mind to disturb their well earned slumbers. A mile down the creek, the moonlight pointed out a level grassy spot unvexed by man or beast, with

pasture sufficient for his pony. To unroll his blankets, pull off his boots, unholster his guns and lay aside his hat were simply segments of a continuing act. In two minutes he was asleep.

By sunup he had eaten breakfast and was again in the saddle. Three miles or so nearer Joy Bells he noted the marker described by the marshal and swung into an intersecting road which turned steeply up a down cutting canyon. Lightly traveled, it indicated that Manning and his partner came little to Everless. A few minutes climb brought him to the end of the canyon and out upon a rolling plateau, covered with bunch grass. There was abundant feed, but he saw few cows.

Once on top, Jennison saw the house

and sheds which formed the hub of the cattle ranch. About a mile away, even at that distance, it gave plain evidences of poverty. A thin arrow of smoke was being discharged from the stove pipe, indicating, if not proving, that someone was at hand and clucking softly to Sunflower, Jennison rode on. There were dips in the road and he was within forty yards of the house when mounting the last flat slope he held the slatternly cabin in full view. Less attractive even than he had at first imagined, he had just noted the rusty, canted stove pipe and sagging door, when his exploring eye caught something that had nothing senile about it. And had he been less agile, had his brain and muscles been less of a perfect coordinating machine, that night Bat Jennison would have slumbered with his fathers. Slyly, but with purposeful intent, the end of a rifle barrel had jutted from behind that sagging door and a clip-second later a left-handed welcome roared greeting to the little man on the yellow pony.

Jennison swan dived from the saddle, missing death by the shade of a whisper, as the bullet sped by, near enough to stir his back hair. Sunflower, no novice to gun fire, moved two steps then halted nonchalantly. For who was he to question his master's moods or methods of dismounting? Without knowing his assailant, Jennison moved swiftly to repel any further attack. As he hit the ground, he drew a pistol and cocked it and now from a screen of ragged grass he concentrated on that deceptively sagging door. If a man had emerged gun in hand, in all probability he would not have cleared the doorway. Fortunately for Scrimp Manning he came forth empty handed.

For it was Manning, a hundred pounds of sinew and courage, moving out to inspect *his kill.* A rod away he stopped short. So intent had he been upon the sprawled figure behind the thin curtain of grass that he had cast not a single glance at the impassive horse. Now for no particular reason he looked at the pony in cursory fashion. Instantly that passing appraisal was transformed. Manning's narrow, slitted eyes opened to their widest, his clamped jaw sagged, a pallor swept swiftly beneath the weathered tan. He zigzagged a rod that seemed interminable and bent haltingly above his man. But he could not quite nerve himself to lift the concealing hat.

"My God!" he croaked. "I've killed Bat Jennison!"

"A fact which I'm doubtin'." And Jennison was on his feet, pushing out his hand to his long time comrade.

The basso profundo of Manning's roar was all but worthy of Whispering Thompson at his peak.

"Hell and hurrah!" he whooped. "Hell and hurrah and then some!"

"Scrimp," Jennison chided him, "I don't mind you're shootin' at me, but mistakin' Sunflower fur Shuck's hoss nigh rises my dander."

"If you'd been setting up all night waiting to get a shot at that damned sooner," Manning made part-defense of his derelict eyesight, "maybe you'd have mistook a yellow horse for one that's sure yellower. Anyway, I'm awful glad to see you, Bat, and almighty happy I missed you. Let's go to the house and have a drink."

"She's a order I ain't in no notion to disregard," Jennison grinned. "And did you say *two* drinks?"

SETTLED on the doorstep with a quart of Old Crow whiskey in easy reaching distance, Jennison turned to his midget companion.

"I met Shuck and his gang yesterday at Everless," he told Manning. "How comes it you're out gunnin' fur him?"

"I ain't seen none of the bunch but Shuck," Manning prefaced, "but I'm gunning for him because he's trying to toll my pardner Sam Noonen into some devilment. I don't know what. I'm afraid he's made it. Sam rode off last night claiming

he was going to Everless, but the way he acted, I doubt it. I think he went to Joy Bells to meet Shuck."

"I was in that blot onto God's handiwork last night, myself," Jennison remarked, "and I doubt it also. Why? Because Shuck lit out fur Joy Bells along in the shank of the evening. The bet is they met up in Joy Bells."

"That ain't even a bet," Manning nodded gloomily. "Sure they did."

Again the bottle gurgled forth a drink.

"Mebby," Jennison suggested, "you'd best tell me how you got mixed up in this said cow pasture. Also what about your pardner?"

"About two years ago," Manning obliged, "I drifted into Everless and happened to meet Sam Noonen. He told me about his ranch which he'd just got started. I had a few hundred dollars and after some palaver I bought in as a full pardner. We'd been gaining too, and getting along good till a week or so ago. Then a fly popped into the goose grease."

"Shuck?"

"Shuck. You see, Bat," he went on, "I never knew much about Noonen, and that mostly one time when he got too drunk."

"Talkity drunk," Jennison contributed. "A damned bad state to arrive into. I know."

"You don't," Manning disputed flatly. "Not once in a lifetime. Anyway, that one time Sam talked. Cried too, at spots, which I don't like in a man. Seems like he lived in Tennessee. His wife died leaving a boy ten years old. Sam was restless, I reckon, so he left the boy with a family and struck west. Come by way of Texas and New Mexico, finally landing in Californy. Mined there, made some money and got into some sort of a mix-up that landed him in the pen. He says he wasn't guilty which is maybe so, maybe not. Anyway he was there five years when he escaped and went to Nevada. All the time, he said, he'd been thinking about his boy and from there he wrote back home to the postmaster. He got a letter finally, telling him that the family he left his boy with had drifted, but that the boy had run off before that. The postmaster didn't know where, but the general rumor there was that he'd come west. Sam's been looking for him ever since, he says. And under a name, that ain't Noonen, I figger, for I'm all but sure Sam changed his name."

"Shuck likely knowed about the Californy jail break," Jennison hazarded.

"I figger so," Manning agreed, "for he's sure got a whip hand over Sam, a whip with a double lash."

"Got your pardner's boy located, also," Jennison surmised.

"Exactly the way I think," Manning nodded. "He's promised to keep still about the pen business, and tell Sam where his boy is, *if* Sam does something for Shuck. Sam's been holding out against whatever Shuck wants him to do, but I figger Sam's finally caved in." He glanced away past the low sheds. "There he comes now," he veered suddenly.

The big man rode fast, leaning forward over the horn, as if the inclination of his body might add to his speed. Sliding his horse to a halt before the door, he lumbered out of the saddle, then stopped short. For the first time he had noted the two men sitting on the step. And he greeted them, in words and manner eloquent of his overmastering haste.

"Howdy, Scrimp. Howdy, stranger," he nodded hurriedly. "Fine morning and everything. 'Scuse me if I tromp between you for I'm in a hell of a rush."

He rummaged around furiously for a few minutes, then emerged with a roll of blankets, his cased Winchester and some odds and ends of food sagging the end of a dirty flour sack. A second sack, evidently holding a few cooking utensils appeared at a second trip. With this dunnage strapped to his saddle, he turned about to make feverish explanation. He was tall and portly with a gray beard not heavy

enough to conceal too large a mouth. As he hesitated now, Jennison was intrigued with his eyebrows. Heavy and shaggy, there spiraled up from either end an inch-long spur of thin hair. Strange as the quirk was, after all, the eyes beneath held for Jennison far greater interest. Exaltation, wild joy and fathomless shame were commingled there. Taking advantage of his partner's faltering, Manning introduced the stranger.

"Sam," said he, "this is Bat Jennison. You've heard me—"

"Sure have," Noonen cackled hoarse interruption. "A thousand times more or less. Damned sorry I ain't got time to stop and visit, but I've got to be rambling. You've been a good partner, Scrimp, so I'm leaving the whole Kebobaree to you. I'm not coming back." He was in the saddle now. "I've found my boy!" he exulted. "He's over at Bootleg Bar waiting for his old dad, and his old dad is hitting the trail for Bootleg Bar. So long!" And like a tornado he roared away.

Jennison broke a long tense silence to declare, "Like Esau in the Scriptures, your pard has sold out fur a mess of porridge."

"What would anybody want with porridge?" Manning speculated dully.

"She's stuff I cain't abide neither," Jennison concurred. "Notwithstandin' that's what your pard's done, speakin' in riddles. He's sold out somethin' to Shuck. We've gotta ranny over to Joy Bells and fox it out. But we won't hurry. The way Noonen left, he'll be a lot of miles frum Joy Bells by the time we need to move thar. He'll probably pelt right through the town, lookin' neither left or right, and he's on a wild goose chase or I'm a Greaser."

Jennison sat for a long moment thinking, then he put his thought into a question.

"You say none of Shuck's men have been here with him?"

"Not a damned one," Manning assured him. Then he amplified. "And he's the only one I've ever seen. More than that, I doubt if Sam ever did, either, unless last night at Joy Bells. You said Shuck and one of his men went there last night, didn't you?"

"He took a man named Sim Jones with him," Jennison explained, "and he left a man named Rapp and another named Tom Moon thar in Everless. He give 'em strict orders also *not* to show up in Joy Bells till dark. He didn't give reasons, so fur as I heered, but outen a doubt he had 'em. We'll toddle over to Joy Bells ourselves, but not till dark, also. Let's leave that pie set onto the shelf now whilst we talk of something better."

"The very ticket," Manning okayed the thought enthusiastically. "But first let's stake Sunflower to some hay. It's the only way I've got of apologizing to him for mistaking him for Shuck's pony."

THEIR talk ranged far and wide as they regilded crowns fit for tried and true comrades, damned crooks and thieves, resampled ancient jokes, revisited camps and reviewed times and events.

"And thar was Sandy McLoon," Jennison reminisced happily. "So stingy that when hay got short that time, Sandy put a sircingle round his jassax and cinched it up a hole a day. And hairy! You couldn't a told him frum a monkey if he'd a had a tail and a tin cup."

"And old Sol Wormley," Manning contributed gustily. "Why once— What are you thinking about, Bat?"

"I've gotta hunch," Jennison said slowly. After a long pause he continued solemnly. "She's moren a hunch, Scrimp. She's the umbilical truth. Jest listen."

Manning listened attentively, but was not entirely convinced.

"Bat," he admitted, "the facts as you set 'em out sure do dovetail, yet you're hanging a heavy weight on a pretty small peg, it looks to me. That brow business might be only a chance."

"Not *that* eyebrow, Scrimp," Jennison distinguished carefully. "That twisted-up flounce that's stapled to Noonen's temple

ain't no happenstance. That's truth talkin'. And what I want to know now is, who'd Noonen know intiment in Joy Bells."

Of the twenty-odd places in Joy Bells dedicated to pleasure, The Chimes was the most notable. Under a single roof it housed that perfect trinity of Western amusements—wine, women and games of chance. Wine is a patent misnomer, for that feeble beverage had few devotees in the rich placer camp. Rather the tastes of the thirsty ran to whiskey and rum, with beer running a lonesome third. Games of chance ran the gamut from faro to roulette, Black Jack and poker, two varities. A third of the ground floor space was given over to dancing, serviced by the girls who lived in the second story of the building.

Into this port of the revelry minded had just barged Dan Shuck and his three satellites. The night was young, that is to say, midnight, and as they had time on their uncallused hands, the four deployed according to inclination. Soon Shuck hovered over a roulette wheel, Rapp was bucking faro, Jones made a foursome at stud poker. The fourth member, Tom Moon, had become one of the crowd that eddied and surged at the skirts of the dance floor. For this hulking youth held the ladies in high regard, and with an arrogance that had little to feed on, assumed jauntily that it was reciprocal.

Presently his abstract admiration moltened into the concrete. A girl in red, whirling by in the arms of a burly miner, had tossed him a dazzling smile. So he watched her avidly till the tide of roisterers swept her away to the farther end of the room, where her smile was lost to sight, but not to memory. Still hopeful, Moon was waiting patiently for a glimpse of the vanished lady when someone tugged his sleeve.

A little man stood there, a total stranger to Moon, who crooked a surreptitious finger, then wriggled away through the crowd. Moon followed till the man halted with his hand on the knob of an outside door. The message to Moon was delivered in a rumbling bass whisper.

"That girl in red," the midget specified, "wants to see you bad. Wouldn't tell me why, but she slipped out the rear door and is waiting for you right now just outside here. Want me to step out and—"

Moon needed no mentor and did not hesitate to say so.

"Tom Tit," he averred loftily, "in love affairs I don't need no wet nurses. I'm aces up in *that* game." And Moon, the irresistible, stepped boldly outside and closed the door resolutely behind him.

AN HOUR later, Shuck looked at his watch. Their period of leisure was over. Without ostentation, he gathered in Rapp and Jones, but discovered that Moon was convincingly missing.

"Chasing one of them painted girls," Shuck sniffed disgustedly. "Thinks he's a heller with women. Well, we can't wait around for him any longer. Come on."

A dozen miles from Joy Bells, the road to Soames' Bar twisted down a wooded slope, ran a dozen yards roughly level, then turned sharply upward. That up-bend was so steep that passengers always climbed out at the foot to lighten the load. Even then the sweating teams could scarcely lug the empty stage up the rocky grade as steep angled as a well pitched roof.

It was daylight when the stage traveling from Joy Bells reached the level space and halted according to its honored custom. Only the grizzled driver was to be seen, though the tight-drawn curtains suggested the presence of passengers. But no passengers descended for the customary ascent, but then programs in the West were subject to sudden changes without formal notice.

Three men, rifles in hand, had stepped out from the bushes, one at the head of the team, two a few feet from the driver. They were unmasked, for Dan Shuck disdained concealment. And he was in a happy mood, for all but in his hands was the golden

fruit of Sam Noonen's perfidy. Here in this stage was the camp's weekly shipment of gold dust, knowledge of which had been wormed by Noonen from his garrulous friend, the express agent at Joy Bells. And now it pleased Shuck to heckle the driver.

"What are you stopping for, Grandpop?" he grinned. "I didn't order you to, did I?"

"I don't need no telling to rest my hosses," the driver answered stolidly. "Even with this empty stage, that's a tough pull."

"Empty stage?" and Shuck chortled loudly. The whole thing was proceeding according to rote, just as Noonen had lined it out to him.

"Sure," the driver nodded. "I'm dragging this old wreck over to Soames' Bar. Got a bang-up wheelwright over there. Fix anything. Well, my team's rested and I'll be moving."

Abruptly Shuck's manner changed. The comedy was played out. He half raised his cocked Winchester.

"Stay where you're at!" he called sharply. "*We* know what's in that damned stagecoach!"

"For instance, what?" Greybeard inquired placidly. "I'll admit there's a couple of old log chains and a shovel with a busted handle and a seat outen one hinge."

"Yeah!" Shuck said sarcastically. "Well, I reckon it's time that I looked at them log chains. Sim," he called to Jones standing at the head of the lead horses, "see that the old pelican don't jackknife his team. And Paul," this to Rapp, "train your gun on his belly. If he even waggles his chin whiskers, shoot!"

"Here's *one* of them said log chains!"

AT THAT jarring statement, Shuck whirled to face Bat Jennison standing there by the open stage door, a Colt dangling in either hand.

"Yep," Jennison continued calmly, "you're right in tellin' yourself that I've got you both covered. Be sensible. Drap your rifles and hist your hands. Wrong moves 'ill come costly, so don't make none. Also that tother *log chain* has now got Sim Jones covered."

It was the appalling truth, for Scrimp Manning had slipped through the other door, glided shadow-wise along in the lee of stage and team, to surprise Jones goggling stupidly at the drama being enacted between Jennison and Shuck.

Jones and Rapp were conquered, but not Dan Shuck. Too many times had he outgamed odds to crumble now, even when he faced Bat Jennison. So seeming to obey, he disobeyed. His hand lowering the Winchester according to orders, paused at his waist, instantly released the rifle, clutched his pistol butt and yanked the gun clear of the holster. It was to be the last error in his long career of violence and crime.

The stage driver leaned down and inspected the body of the unwise Shuck.

"Neat," he appraised it with an artist's satisfaction in a deed perfectly done. "Never seen better and I've seen considerable."

Jennison studied Jones and Rapp for a moment and there was neither rebuke nor moralizing in his tones as he said, "You boys is young and oughta should change your company. Comes another time and you might not be so lucky. I'm turnin' you loose minus your artillery. If I was you, I'd travel fast and fur. Pick up your dead boss and lift him into the stage. Easy now. Straighten him out. That's right. Now skedaddle. No, skedaddle outen thanks. And good luck—should you change your ways. Besides," he confided to Manning as the reprieved men fairly galloped away, "they won't blab about Noonen."

With some little difficulty the stage was turned about, and headed for Joy Bells, both Jennison and Manning riding on top the stage with the driver. At the end of

a mile, this taciturn individual had evolved a slow question which he proceeded to unfold to Jennison. "How come," he queried, "you figgered this Tom Moon was Sam Noonen's lost boy?"

"Frum the similar crook-up in their eyebrows," Jennison answered. "That's somethin' that couldn't never be mistook."

Judge Bean's Bear

BY S. OMAR BARKER

OLD time trains on the S. P. Line,
Down where the sands of the Pecos shine,
Sometimes stopped at Vinegarroon
Where old Judge Bean had a quaint saloon,
To which the passengers made a rush
To sample his famous "rub-o'-the-brush."
There, like as not, they'd pause to stare
Awhile at a big fat cinnamon bear
Chained to a post with the shade so scant
That the Texas heat made him puff and pant.
"That b'ar," old Judge Roy Bean would grin,
"Can do more tricks than a harlequin,
But he won't perform, the smart ol' skunk,
Till he's had some beer to make him drunk.
He talks like a human, cusses, too,
On about four quarts of good brown brew.
Any you gents that would like to try it?
I've got the beer—if you want to buy it."
It never failed. Some traveling gent
With a wholesome hanker for merriment
Across the Lone Star Bar, *kerplunk,*
Would pay for the beer to get him drunk.

Four bits a bottle was Judge Bean's price,
And the beer looked good and it gurgled nice
As down the old bear's hatch it ran.
"He'll talk purty soon jest like a man—
Jest one more bottle will do the trick,"
Judge Bean would grin, "if he gits it quick!"
One more bottle . . . alas, too late!
The train would whistle—it wouldn't wait!
As travelers ran to resume their trip
Judge Bean would pull at his whiskered lip:
"Bart, git that b'ar in outa the sun.
He's sold some beer, we've had some fun—
Give him some meat—he's earned a chunk.
You reckon he ever would git drunk?"

Their Job Was to Keep Him Alive, Not Destroy Him With Endless Questions

MURDER HAS A HEADACHE

By RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

Author of "Detect Or Die," etc.

CHAPTER I

"A MURDER, NEW STYLE"

RANKIN DADE stood where he had a clear view of the cars rolling up to the West Palm Beach railroad station. He watched them discharge passengers for the northbound super de luxe Southland flyer, otherwise the 12:42. His face was sober; his eyes mild behind round, metal-rimmed spectacles.

Bill Mulcay, a massive six-footer who wore thin-soled shoes with low heels in an effort to look average size, came up to him.

"Set," Bill reported. "I got two porters. They'll take the stuff from the chauffeur. We'll be a mile away on the Federal before von Kleppner can open his face. Coming with me, Navy?"

"No," said Rankin Dade. "I want to see just how wide von Kleppner opens his face."

"Getting you what?" Bill Mulcay asked.

"I'm a private dick, too," said Rankin Dade. "With private thoughts. Scatter!"

"Ar!" said Bill Mulcay and returned to his plant.

At the height of the well-bred, purring assembly of impeccable cars the Reichert convertible arrived. Henrich Reichert, plump as a pigeon, waited until the chauffeur had opened the door. Erect and agile in spite of his bulk, he preceeded his guest from the car. His eyes, singularly close set in his broad face, switched this way and that over the throng. Then they came back to Joachim von Kleppner as the gaunt, impressive looking German stepped out of the car. Unlike Reichert, von Kleppner moved deliberately, conveying the impres-

sion of dignity at the expense of youthfulness. He looked healthy enough to move fast. His hand, sinewy enough to strangle a bull, played delicately with a handkerchief.

Rankin Dade's eyes barely noted the chauffeur handing over the big kitbag and the suitcase to Bill Mulcay's porters. He was studying the two men. Dade's forehead was taut above his intent eyes.

Of a sudden Heinrich Reichert laid a hand on von Kleppner's elbow. His voice rose above the babel. His tone was charged with emotion. Von Kleppner freed himself with vigorous, lean arms. He replied briefly, with a forced, lip curling smile and shrugging shoulders.

Reichert was begging, imploring with shameless intensity. Queerly the guttural of his German rose to almost a falsetto shriek. He gripped at von Kleppner again.

The distinguished von Kleppner started back, jerking away with instinctive violence. His reaction seemed to be surprise. He spoke in swift rebuke. He flicked his handkerchief to indicate to Reichert the watching crowd around them. Then he dabbed his forehead with linen.

Reichert's mood changed. He clenched his right fist and struck out at von Kleppner.

Beneath its superficial layer of flesh his thick muscles and big bones were revealed in his swift action. His blow hit von Kleppner on the mouth. The older man's head snapped back. Reichert bored in, striking with both hands. He sent von Kleppner staggering away into the crowd, fending off what blows he could. Though he was a man of considerable bone and muscle, in the prime of life, Reichert's suddenness seemed to have beaten him. He tried no offense. His eyes were fixed on his assailant's eyes.

Rankin Dade stood still. He didn't miss anything.

The paralysis of the crowd was succeeded by cries of remonstrance and then, abruptly, by action. Three or four men rushed at Reichert, trying to smother his arms.

Reichert got in one more blow, a right swing, carefully gauged. His fist landed on von Kleppner's jaw. He went down.

Next instant Reichert's arms were caught and held. He struggled hard. He tried to kick out at his prostrate enemy. He switched from German to English:

"Let me go!" he cried. "That Nazi schwein! I will kill him! He has stolen from me most secret evidence. He will condemn my old grandfather to the concentration camp! You do not understand! Let me go! I'll kill him!"

Von Kleppner raised his head. Blood was trickling from his face. It was composed but his eyes were full of hate.

"The man raves!" he said. "He is insane!"

A POLICEMAN arrived. The men who held Reichert released their prisoner to him. Reichert talked excitedly. He thrust past the officer and struck at von Kleppner as he was being assisted to his feet.

Von Kleppner dropped. The policeman shoved Reichert away, back against a wall and held him there in spite of his struggles and raging accusations. A brisk young man, oozing self-confidence, appeared at the officer's shoulder and, screened by the copper's back, noted down a few words on a wad of copy paper folded twice.

Reichert's chauffeur, who had been quite invisible during the excitement, arrived to lend his master moral support by his dignity and impeccable uniform. The policeman began to perspire freely when he heard Reichert's name. His eyes were uneasy.

He took his hands off the heavy-set young man but kept between him and von Kleppner. The young reporter shifted to von Kleppner, pouring out questions.

Von Kleppner was receiving sketchy first aid treatment from several indignant ladies. Rage had made him pallid. His

eyes blazed the more brilliantly out of that pallor at Heinrich Reichert.

The policeman spoke to the station agent and the railroad man made for a telephone.

Queerly, Rankin Dade's eyes were no longer held by the spectacle. One casual glance at the crowd beyond the two men had shown him Scar Lip.

Dade studied this stocky, black-eyed man, perhaps thirty, with a scar slightly distorting his upper lip and a restless right hand that kept touching that scar.

Scar Lip's attention was unwaveringly on Reichert and von Kleppner. He didn't do anything about them. He leaned against a pillar, half concealed by it, and watched. His expression was saturnine. Several times since he had come to Palm Beach, Rankin Dade had seen that face, under a downturned featherweight felt hat, as part of the deep background of some activity of Reichert and his guest, von Kleppner.

Now, the crowd thinned slightly around the two men, Scar Lip faded out behind his pillar, strolled away two hundred feet and sat on a bench with his head down.

Rankin Dade walked off in the opposite direction. He called a taxi, gave an address and was whisked away.

Two miles south the taxi turned off Number One Highway and stopped in front of an old style bungalow, embowered in palms and hibiscus with a heavy red-tiled roof squashing down white stucco walls.

A nondescript sedan, unremarkable in every particular, stood in front of the garage.

Rankin Dade knocked, passed time of day with an elderly woman who opened the door and walked into the lady's spare bedroom, now occupied by a transient paying guest.

The guest, Bill Mulcay, who had gotten up off his knees to unlock the door, went down on them again. Before him was spread on the floor the entire contents of Joachim von Kleppner's kitbag and suitcase.

Rankin ignored the stuff. "Better pack up," he said.

Mulcay cast a disgusted eye over the lot and menaced it with a massive fist.

"Satan!" he said. "Not a paper. Not a thing. Nothing! Unless you call a Luger pistol something?" He held up the gun.

"I don't," said Rankin. "Put it back."

"What was keepin' you?" Bill asked.

"I was watching a murder, new style," Rankin Dade said. He took off his spectacles, squinted through them, breathed on a lens and began polishing it.

"A murder?" Bill Mulcay was jolted. "Wasn't there any jack in stopping it? Who—"

"A murder in process," Rankin Dade said. "Not even the corpse, who's still alive, knows it yet."

"If the corpse—"

"Believe it," Rankin said. "The victim might as well be stiff because not even the Finane Protective Service can save him now. Send that stuff back to the railroad station by taxi. Porter's mistake—wrong bags."

"I know a couple o' other guys the Finane Protective Service ain't goin' to save," Bill Mulcay said unhappily. "This what's-it, von Kleppner, has put it over on us like a coat of paint. Finane will—"

His prophecy was doleful but accurate.

CHAPTER II

"WATCH THIS!"

JOACHIM VON KLEPPNER remained boldly in the public eye most of that day. He spoke his piece at the station agent's office to police officials, a justice of the peace and some newspaper men. He declined to make a charge against Reichert. This was a great relief to the inquirers, except the newspaper men.

Palm Beach, like other resorts, respects wealth. And Heinrich Reichert was the grandson and one of the three right hands of the founder of that international colos-

sus, Reichert Chemical Industries, Inc., New York, Berlin, Rio de Janeiro and most other cities of the world. Moreover it was Heinrich Reichert who had leased for himself and his absent grandfather one of the most imposing, if slightly demoded, mansions in Palm Beach.

It was freely whispered that old Dr. Bernhard Reichert and his more important descendants were, as matters of convenience, citizens of three nations, the United States, Germany and Brazil, a manifest impossibility—or was it? But in this town Heinrich Reichert was a winter resident and rated A 1.

Long before von Kleppner was through with the formalities Rankin Dade and Bill Mulcay were back on his tail. Announcing himself too shaken to travel, von Kleppner retired to a hotel.

Working through a friendly house dick, Finane Protective's two aces got a look at their subject's clothes when he gave them to the valet for renovation. No papers.

When, by a mechanical misfortune arranged by Bill Mulcay, von Kleppner became locked in his bathroom they cased his room thoroughly. When he was released, the hotel dick, as a locksmith cased the bathroom.

It was all done as efficiently as the two Finane operatives had shadowed the dignified von Kleppner during the last six days of his visit to Heinrich Reichert. The result was exactly the same, too. Nothing.

"Unless he's got it under his skin," Bill Mulcay said.

"You never know when to quit," Rankin Dade said.

"Yuh? Well, I c'n tell you something, Navy," Mulcay complained. "This paper chase ain't under your skin any. You must pardon me for boring you with it."

Rankin nodded politely. The charge was true. His assistance that day had been casual.

"Another thing," Bill Mulcay said, "why don't the von fan out o' here?"

"Give!" said Rankin with interest.

"I'll give when I've got," said Bill.

They had dinner in a West Palm Beach cafeteria. Bill Mulcay's first course was a newspaper.

"Listen to our confidential, extra-secret case," Bill said unhappily. "All over Page One. An' Reichert, the guy that's been

screamin' 'Sh!' at us for near a week, gives this blab an interview on top of it. Look!" He pointed the headlines at Rankin Dade:

LONG ARM OF HITLER REACHES W. PALM BEACH

Wealthy Chemical Man Fells Alleged Nazi Agent in Station

"Listen!" said Bill Mulcay and began reading:

"Claiming that a guest in his house had profaned his hospitality by stealing certain papers implicating his grandfather, Dr. Bernhard Reichert, naturalized American citizen, today at the West Palm Beach railroad station assaulted Dr. Joachim von Kleppner, said to be registered with the State Department as an agent of the German Government, who was the guest in question, knocking him down and—"

"What that reporter needs is a period key on his typewriter," Rankin said. "Stop for air, Bill."

"Air is what we're going to get, plenty," Mulcay said.

"Eat your fruit salad cup, then," Ran-

kin said. "You're still eating on the old swindle sheet."

He extended his hand and, mechanically, Mulcay surrendered the paper.

Rankin skipped the lengthy description of the hostilities he had witnessed. But he did not pass up a word of their client's interview. None of it was news to him.

In much the same manner in which Reichert had explained the situation to him and to Mulcay, Reichert had outlined it to the press. Joachim von Kleppner was a self-invited guest. Heinrich Reichert had been most polite. With his grandfather, head of the family and of the chemical business, in Germany, no other course was possible with a Nazi agent. Old Dr. Reichert's business in Germany was ostensibly for the commercial benefit of the Reich, hard pressed by heavy losses in men and materials in Russia. Actually Reichert explained, the old doctor was there to contact saner elements than the Nazis. It was his belief, his grandson said, that the Nazi cause was lost. He felt that the salvation of the German people lay in disavowing the Nazis before Germany suffered crushing military reverses.

OLD DR. REICHERT had been in highly confidential correspondence with a few other influential Germans here, in South America and even in Germany who believed as he did. Finally, in spite of his age and a serious heart ailment, he had undertaken a trip to Berlin via Brazil and Lisbon with his grandson, Kurt Braun. Naturally he took not the slightest clue to his correspondence with him.

It was the file of these letters that had been stolen from the old industrialist's locked desk by Joachim von Kleppner, Reichert declared. Evidence he could not reveal proved this.

'The letters will mean the concentration camp, perhaps even execution, for my grandfather," Rankin Dade read.

"Mr. Reichert explained that on finding the desk broken open he had immediately taken all possible steps to prevent von Kleppner from passing on the letters to some other Nazi agent. He had sent for private detectives."

"Maybe we'll get our pictures in the paper," Rankin suggested, bringing his spectacles to bear on his brother dick. Bill Mulcay turned the color of the grapefruit segments in his fruit cup. Rankin read on:

"Politely but with the utmost vigilance, Heinrich Reichert explained, he had maintained watch over Mr. von Kleppner since the theft. He had been virtually a prisoner on the broad grounds of the stately house rented that winter by the Reicherts. When the Nazi agent left it, for whatever cause, Heinrich Reichert had accompanied him. Detectives had searched everywhere to recover the letters upon which so much depended. They had failed."

"I know we'll get our pictures in the paper," Rankin said. Bill Mulcay had quit eating.

"As a last resort, when Dr. von Kleppner was returning North, Reichert explained, he had appealed to the man to spare his grandfather from the grim consequences of Nazi fury. The Nazi alleged agent had denied knowing anything about the missing file. This had been a pleasure trip for him, von Kleppner had said callously. Losing his self-control, Reichert admitted, he had attacked the man."

"Maybe we'd better be getting back on the job, huh?" said Bill Mulcay.

Rankin Dade smiled briefly. "What job?"

Their cab stopped in front of the great iron gates of the estate that the Reichert family had rented. The gates were shut.

When Rankin Dade had paid off the cab driver both men turned from the accelerating car. They almost stepped on Francis Finane. He had appeared like a ghost.

"So!" said the little old master of Finane Protective Service. He spoke with soft venom to Rankin Dade. "This is the young hero who wanted to use my agency as a

steppin' stone back into the Navy through a job in naval intelligence, is it?"

"It still is," said Rankin.

"His eyes is too weak after a fever, the Navy says, throwing him overboard," Finane purred. "But a word from the great Finane to hard-pressed Naval Intelligence, he says, an' the surgeon general would waive the defect. This is the lad, is it?"

"Why, boss," Bill Mulcay said weakly, "what're you doin' away from Miami?"

FINANE went into a crouch, shoulders hunched. Then he straightened suddenly, like a striking snake, and Bill Mulcay jumped. "Well, if ye were blind ye'd see better!" Finane said to Rankin Dade. "So ye can't even see where a third-rate Nazi agent has tucked away somethin' as bulky as letters, is it?"

Bill Mulcay was relaxing. The boss never wasted the mother and father of a tongue lashing on men he was firing.

"Come in and see the client, sir," said Rankin Dade.

With Finane whispering horribly at his ear he opened the small gate in the iron portal with a key and led the way into Reichert's huge estate. The narrow drive twisted like a snake among tropic foliage that the neglectful gardeners of a place long empty had allowed to spread and reach unchecked. Palms, royal, coco, date, travelers—countless varieties of palm—feathery Australian pines, papyrus, hibiscus, bougainvillea—everything which should have made a garden made a jungle instead. Under the black shadows even Finane fell silent.

They came to the house, a great Spanish house presenting little but blank walls to the outside world. Rankin Dade deserted the driveway to lead under a small vaulted way to the patio. Here in this stone-flagged court the verdure had been beaten back, subdued but not destroyed. A fountain played and there was moonlight.

Rankin Dade murmured a request for silence. He raised his hand in a pointing gesture. "There he is," he said. "Look at him."

Heinrich Reichert, his plump yet erect figure unmistakable under the Florida moon, was pacing the court opposite. Behind him were the broad glass windows of the principal rooms of the house. His manner was relaxed, his step slow and somehow almost swaggering. His dinner jacket glowed snow white under the moon; his inhalations of his cigarette were deep, gratified, occasional.

"Watch this," said Rankin Dade softly. "Wholly experimental."

Unknown to either of his companions his right hand slipped inside his coat.

Next instant the whole patio was ablare with hideous sound.

CHAPTER III

A BARGAIN TO LIVE

DADE'S shot was raucous blasphemy; it blasted moonlight and peace. It spat a chunk of singing lead above Reichert's bent head into a broad pane of glass that graced the library window. It startled his two rugged and ever-ready companions as they had never been startled before.

It did more. It sent Reichert dropping to the paved court behind the swelling bole of a cocopalm and brought a roaring gun into his hand.

Rankin Dade was whirling before Reichert's first shot. He fled precipitately out of the patio and Finane and Mulcay ran with him.

"Ye're fired—the two—of ye!" Finane gasped out as they dodged and swerved among the overhanging trees of the black jungle. Helpless profanity at this sacrilegious assault on a client came jolting out of him. Mulcay was past words, a rare state.

Rankin Dade's course was not a blind one. They emerged into comparatively clear ground near the iron grillework that separated one side of the estate from the

street. Further ahead the moonlight glinted on the wavelets of Lake Worth.

Finane gathered breath to curse. He was looking for a gate, an overhanging tree, anything to get out of there. A wise man in his line, he knew not all the words spoken since the world began would explain or excuse that wanton attack on a cash customer. His agency hung by a thread. He wanted out and away, did Francis Finane.

He saw a gate. Obligingly Rankin Dade opened it for him.

"Fired—the two of ye!" Finane raged. "In fact, ye were fired before ye cut loose at him, Dade, an' well ye know it."

"I know it," said Rankin Dade. "But, boss, doesn't Reichert's speed show he knows things may happen that he hasn't told—"

"I'm in Miami—where I should ha' stayed," said Finane. "Whatever your game, Dade, I'm not in it! An' never was. Throwin' lead at the hand that feeds ye!"

"And missing it," said Rankin Dade. He was wiping his spectacles, steamed up by that flight through the warm jungle.

Finane went off down the street. His craft had returned; he moved no more than sluggishly to the eye. Yet it was amazing how swiftly he disappeared.

For a moment longer Rankin Dade stood still, oblivious to the outpourings of William Mulcay.

He was adding a cartridge to the clip of his gun to make up for the one that had moved on.

"Come on," he said briskly to Mulcay. "Our line is that we heard that shot—and then more shots. We were in the grounds, having a last faithful look for that letter file. We think we heard a man running but we can't be sure. Get it?"

"If I had the guts of a grasshopper I'd be turnin' you in, Navy," Mulcay said. "How long had we been here?"

"Half an hour."

"Wnat's the gag—gunning like that?"

"Were you expecting von Kleppner to come back and attack Reichert?" Rankin Dade asked.

"No," said Mulcay. "Why should he? He made ring-tailed monkeys out o' us and got the stuff at the cost of a little slugging. Why would he stick his neck out? I didn't expect him back."

"Reichert did," Rankin Dade said. "He had his gun handy and he was fast with it."

"Proving what, Mister Detective?" Mulcay inquired heavily.

Rankin Dade had slid his gun back in its holster and was under way. He shook his head. "Lesson Twenty-six got lost in the mail."

Not far from the house a gabble of voices cut through the night. Flashlights were jerking about a spot near the edge of a thick clump of jungle foliage. Silently they headed that way.

Half a dozen servants of both sexes were clustered around. The high note of hysteria was in some voices. Higby, the chauffeur, was trying to take charge.

The detectives thrust through the group. Flashlights which lifted to identify them fell simultaneously to a man on the ground. It was Heinrich Reichert. He lay on his back.

"Not dead, sir, but—look at him!" said Higby.

That was what Rankin Dade was doing. Reichert had taken a couple of hard blows on the left side of his head just below the line of his glossy brown hair. The swellings were pronounced. One was bleeding. Bill Mulcay whistled admiringly.

"Either o' those pats would put a man out," he said. "Looks like somebody was swinging a rod by the butt."

"Bring him inside, a couple of you," said Rankin Dade to the chauffeur. His eyes switched from a massive date palm to an automatic pistol beside Reichert's right hand. He picked it up carefully and smelled the muzzle. It had been fired recently.

"Reichert's," he said. "Somebody else had one, too."

"I didn't want 'em to touch anything, sir," said Higby as he and a footman lifted their master.

THEY laid him on a couch of Spanish leather in his study. He stirred even before a wet towel arrived.

"Cheese!" said Bill Mulcay. "Some skull!"

Reichert came to, but it was some time before he spoke. His eyes, so close together in that broad face, questioned them. Bill Mulcay reeled off the story of the faithful dicks returning after failing to find the letters in von Kleppner's bags to make a final desperate search in the grounds. Rankin Dade taped a small bandage over the cut on his head.

"Somebody fired at me in the patio," Heinrich Reichert said at last. Rankin Dade did not blink. "I fired back. I was searching a shrubbery when a man stepped out from behind a big date palm and struck at me." He hesitated. "It was shadowy—dark—but I am sure that it was von Kleppner."

Rankin Dade leaned back against the wall. He said nothing.

"Why not?" said Bill Mulcay. "The Von comes back to finish the argument—or say—he could ha' come back for the file, having bunked it somewheres on the grounds." He paused; then added hastily: "Just like we'd deduced. D'we jug him?"

"No!" said Heinrich Reichert. "No! The matter is too delicate. Not now." He was black-browed, brooding. "No." He looked up and from one to the other. "Now I am a target for Nazi agents," he said. "They will not forget."

"Applesauce, Mr. Reichert!" said Bill Mulcay. "We hear things in our business. Them Nazi babies are kept too busy lining up sabotage jobs an' picking up information. Later, maybe revenge. Right now, with Germany on top an' trying to stay that way, business! You're safe as—"

He stopped. An idea burst across his face.

"At that you could take a little protection," he said. "Say, Mr. Reichert, could you use a couple o' trustworthy men—with no agency overhead to make 'em expensive—to keep von Kleppner an' his lugs acting nice?"

Frowning, Reichert started to shake his head. But of a sudden his head became rigid. He stared across his study and his brows came together, painfully. He was silent for thirty seconds.

"You are no longer with Finane?" he asked.

"No," said Mulcay. "Disagreement."

"He fired us," said Rankin Dade suddenly. "We didn't do so well on this case—and a couple of others."

"Good!" he said at last. "I'll hire you to watch me—to keep me alive, let us say. Ten dollars a day each. No more!"

"We'll keep you alive, Mr. Reichert," said Bill Mulcay. "Plenty. This case is one we can handle. Huh, Dade?"

Rankin Dade spoke again. "To be kept alive until further notice," he said. "That's the job. Just keep you alive—not snipe for papers."

"Yes," said Reichert slowly. "That is what I retain you for—at a daily rate. Now I think."

CHAPTER IV

A MOAN FROM MULCAY

HEINRICH REICHERT did think, with tight-lipped concentration, while Bill Mulcay, embarrased to be in on somebody's private cogitations like that, shuffled his feet.

"You managed to search von Kleppner's bags today?" Reichert asked. "I know you did not find my file. Did you find anything in the bags that might help us?"

"Nothin' but a Luger—an' that wouldn't help us," Bill Mulcay said, with a passing glance at the lumps on Reichert's head.

Again strained silence. Then Reichert stood up somewhat shakily. He crossed to

his desk, pressed a button and spoke into an intercommunication phone, ordering his car. He said to them: "I wish to see von Kleppner tonight—if he has returned to his hotel. A word face to face may end this. We go."

Ignoring Bill's solicitous doubts about his fitness to go anywhere he led the way to the car. Higby whirled them down the overshadowed and twisting driveway, headed north to Royal Palm Way and shot smoothly along the bridge toward West Palm Beach.

A sudden bulge of traffic ahead filled the road. The car crawled, then stopped, completely blocked.

Ahead people were almost filling the roadway and leaning for a couple of hundred feet over the side of the bridge.

Reichert stirred impatiently. After a few moments he looked at Rankin Dade. "Please find out what this is about," he said. To Mulcay he added:

"You will stay with me."

At the focus of excitement Rankin Dade managed to pick up the story.

A drowned man—some yachtsman—picked up floating under his dinghy. Why didn't he sink? He had sunk about six feet. It was a queer one. Apparently somehow the guy had tangled his leg up in a short piece of the line on his grapnel. Anyhow, the weight of the anchor had held him down under water until he had drowned.

"Some guys mix water with their alcohol," a tourist said. "Me, I take mine straight. It's safer."

There was a sudden swirl in the crowd as the dead man was lifted up over the side of the bridge. Rankin Dade stood firm. The rays of a nearby lamp showed him the body. For a moment it looked like the remains of Scar Lip, the watcher at the railroad station. But there was no scar on that upper lip and the body in its brass-buttoned white yachting uniform was less stalwart than that of Scar Lip. It had the same wide black eyes, but they were glassy rather than saturnine, similar blunt features and glossy black hair.

A couple of policemen arrived in a car and started breaking things up. Rankin Dade left.

Briefly he described the incident to Heinrich Reichert as their car swept on toward West Palm Beach.

"Probably the man was off balance in his boat when he threw his grapnel over with a coil around his leg," Reichert said. "A curious accident. I must warn my cousin Sigismund Korndorf about this. His yacht now, I believe, is down in Biscayne Bay."

Under orders from Reichert, Higby maneuvered the car to the curb half a block from von Kleppner's hotel entrance. As the chauffeur jumped out to open the door a man on the street beat him to the door handle.

It was Francis Finane. His suddenness was smoother than usual. He blighted his two ex-employees with one glance and spoke to Reichert.

"The Finane Protective Service has just started on this case, sir; I've tried my own hand at it, mine being better even than some I trusted."

"You are wrong, Mr. Finane," said Reichert. He sat still in the car. "Your agency has just finished on this case. Unless, of course, you have recovered my grandfather's letters?"

"No," said Francis Finane sourly. "But I can tell ye that von Kleppner within the last ten minutes has been anglin' to sell his story, or what he'll call his story, to a news service."

"How long have you been covering the man tonight?" Reichert asked sharply.

"Not much longer than that ten minutes," Finane admitted.

"Von Kleppner could have been my attacker, then," Reichert pointed out sharply to Rankin. "Mr. Finane, what is his room number?"

"Three twenty-two. He's in the lobby now. I know that——"

Reichert laid a hand on his damaged head. "Not now," he said. "I need a few minutes' rest. Kindly make your final report to Dade and Mulcay."

HE WAVED the two detectives out of the car. "I will be safe resting here as long as you have von Kleppner in view," he said. "Return in fifteen minutes."

Finane stalked away to the hotel lobby. The old man's eyes were ferocious when he looked at his ex-dicks.

"We're guards now, not operatives," Rankin Dade said cherily. He looked about for von Kleppner.

"Subway guards," Finane growled. But honestly enough he told them of picking up von Kleppner in the lobby, following him to a cigar store and listening in the next phone booth to what scraps he could hear of the German's sales talk to the feature service he was dickering with.

"Another thing," he added. "An' why should I tell it to ye, the poor fool I am? I came up here from Miami in my car after the radio had told me how ye'd botched the case. And I gave a lad a ride —a bright lad who was with me once but now is a Government man."

He glowered at Rankin Dade. "There are some that make that jump," he interjected. "Well, this lad said to me, 'Von Kleppner is in luck to be given a job involvin' a wealthy family like the Reicherts.' Not even the Nazis trust that heel too much an' the devil knows the Nazis aren't particular about what they use for agents. The blackmailing an' double-crossing possibilities will look like turtle soup to von Kleppner.' "

"That could be why he's hanging around instead of lamming," Bill said. "Blackmail or newspaper blab money. He knows our concentration camps ain't working yet."

Rankin Dade nodded thoughtfully. "But we're still fired?" he asked Finane.

"An' will stay that way," Finane retorted sourly. "Now get back to your man, not that ye could keep hurt off him, the two of ye together."

Bill started. "Where the Von? Has he—"

Rankin Dade moved his eyes slightly, drawing Bill's with them to a group of men engaged in hearty conversation, with much waving of cigars, close to the newsstand.

Suddenly the bruised face of Joachim von Kleppner showed beyond this shifting screen. The man was watching them, imposing, dignified, in spite of his tense interest.

Bill Mulcay grunted. "Knows all the tricks, don't he?" he said. "Look, boss, give us the office, if we are on our own. Any Federal eye on the Von?"

"Not a G.," said Finane. "They're up to their chins in real rough stuff. Von Kleppner never was used for anything but propaganda. Do ye pay me for this?"

"I'll be dropping in on you," Rankin Dade said to Francis Finane. "The navy still needs my intelligence. Now we return to our mutton."

The car was where they had left it Rankin exclaimed softly. Higby was standing beside it. Mulcay moaned. Reichert was gone.

Chapter V

"cousins don't count"

HIGBY opened the door for them. "Mr. Reichert will return in a moment, sir," he said to Rankin Dade. He could tell them no more than that Reichert had walked down the street.

"Twenty bucks a day—walking down a dark street," Bill Mulcay growled.

They headed in the direction Reichert had taken, looking for possible destinations for a man not feeling well. They went only two blocks. On the way back Rankin stopped and looked down the street at another entrance to von Kleppner's hotel.

"Better get back to the car," Rankin Dade said. He headed for the hotel and walked down the corridor to the lobby. No Reichert. His quick eyes picked up von Kleppner over by the reception desk. He was alone and speaking to one of the clerks.

"I say to you that I did leave my key at this desk," von Kleppner was exclaiming angrily as Rankin strolled past. "Where is it? Why haf you not got it?"

Rankin made for the elevators. He ascended to the third floor. No floor clerk on duty. He headed for three twenty-two. He and Bill Mulcay knew all about von Kleppner's room after their afternoon's unsuccessful work. There was a lattice transom over the door. Its slats revealed a light on in the room. Rankin approached noiselessly. By the door he stopped, listening, with his hand in his pocket as if fumbling for a key.

Somebody with a remarkable capacity for noiseless movement shoved something that felt like a gun muzzle against his back. Rankin Dade blinked as if somebody had hit him.

"Move," the man murmured. Readily Rankin obeyed. He was marched past Three twenty-two to the next room door.

"In!" came the command.

The door handle responded to Rankin's fingers. He stepped in, switched on the light without being asked, and then turned slowly, to give his captor time to warn him not to, rather than to shoot.

The man with the automatic was Scar Lip, the interested spectator at the railroad station. He shoved Rankin away with a jab of the gun muzzle. Rankin Dade was still staring into the gun muzzle. There was something brownish red about the orifice that should be black. He looked at Scar Lip's white shirt. There was a light brown smear across the front.

"Why didn't you wipe off your gun muzzle after slugging Reichert?" he asked.

Scar Lip gulped in his breath. He was hit. But his pistol didn't waver.

"Take off your coat," he commanded.

Slowly Rankin Dade obeyed.

As Rankin's arms were both involved with the coat sleeves Scar Lip stepped in and took his gun out of his shoulder holster. He dropped it in his side pocket.

"What's this all about?" Rankin Dade asked, continuing to slide out of his coat. He examined Scar Lip intently. His eyes compared this man with the drowned man on the South Bridge.

"I'm asking the questions—later," Scar Lip said. "Empty the stuff in those coat pockets out on the bed—everything. Your story had better check with what I find in them."

He was no gutter mug, Scar Lip. His voice had the authentic distinctness of utterance that indicated education. As he put a hand in a coat pocket Rankin Dade heard through the transom the soft, exasperating click of the latch of von Kleppner's door.

With all the strength of his wrists he flipped the coat into Scar Lip's face. Simultaneously he ducked low and to the side and charged in.

It didn't work. Scar Lip knocked down the coat with his right arm before he was smothered in it. Without shifting his grip on the trigger he hit out at Rankin's spectacled eyes with the heavy gun.

Rankin Dade's eyes were his strong spot. Every thug he had ever tackled since the Navy had eased him out and gone for them. As a result, nobody was fast enough to register on them. Rankin's open right hand was coming up to protect them before Scar Lip's pistol came down at them. He closed his fingers on Scar Lip's gun wrist. It was going to be bad news as his grip tightened. His other hand tore at Scar Lip's coat pocket, spilling his own gun to the floor.

Instantly, with the last freedom of his wrist, Scar Lip let go of his gun. He kicked both guns under the bed as Rankin dived for them.

Before Rankin could get a hand back to him he rolled across the bed and ran to the window. He leaped to the sill and with shoulder, hip and knee ripped the screen from its frame. As it dropped toward the street Rankin Dade got to the window.

SCAR LIP jumped off the sill toward the top of a cocopalm below. It was a broad jump and a mangling fall if he missed. He made the tree, crashing into the soft feathery young fronds that formed its center. Grabbing hold of a tougher branch projecting out over the street he swung down on it to the ground.

Rankin Dade wheeled instantly. He headed for the hall. The hall was empty. The light in von Kleppner's room was out. His door was locked. Rankin hit the door right, with his full strength. The lock gave. The man who had been in there was gone. Von Kleppner's clothes were strewn on the floor. His bags gaped empty.

On the run Rankin went back to the room next door. He retrieved his coat and the two guns from the floor. He glanced out the window.

Scar Lip had gone. A couple of colored citizens stood together looking down the street. Their carefree appreciation of the white man's speed came rising to Rankin's ears.

"Scar Lip didn't want to answer any questions himself," Rankin decided. "The young man had something solid at stake to risk a jump like that. And he didn't want me to know who was in the Von's room."

In the corridor he asked an agitated maid indignantly what was going on and descended to the lobby. Neither of the two boys running the elevators had recently had a passenger from the third floor. Bill Mulcay appeared in the entrance, motioning to him.

"Reichert's back," Bill said. "Went to a drug store."

Reichert was slumped in his seat in the car.

"The stuff that drug clerk gave me has done my head no good," he said slowly. "I am not fit to talk to von Kleppner tonight. I must wait."

On the return ride Rankin asked Reichert: "Are you sure it was von Kleppner who slugged you?"

"Positive!" said Reichert.

The old butler was waiting at the entrance to the house in the overgrown garden. He was distressed.

"Sir," he said. "I have bad news."

"Go on," said Reichert.

"The police have been here. They reported that a drowned man picked up in Lake Worth"—he gestured westward with a fragile arm—"has been identified as your cousin, Sigismund Korndorf."

"Sigismund!" said Reichert. "I thought his boat was down in Biscayne Bay or among the Keys!" He looked at the two detectives. "That man, then, on the bridge, was my cousin," he said.

"Cousins don't count," Bill muttered to Rankin. "We still collect the twenty."

CHAPTER VI

A NAME FOR SCAR LIP

AN HOUR spent at the police station and in making arrangements about the body added nothing to anybody's knowledge of when or where the accident

had occurred. Rankin and Bill Mulcay did little more than listen, though Rankin did have a thoughtful look at the body.

Bill Mulcay joined him. "Bruises, huh?" Bill said, bending to look at a mark on the jaw below the dead man's ear.

"A bruise," said Rankin.

The police lieutenant had had an eye on them.

"There'd have to be a bruise," he said. "Aboard his boat they say he was a strong swimmer—strong enough to swim with that grapnel pulling him down. But if he cracked his jaw on the gunwale going overside— Finish!"

Rankin Dade nodded. "It's the most likely explanation—so far," he said.

In spite of his aching skull Reichert insisted that the police return to his place to inspect his private pier. He thought it probable that Sigismund was coming to see him. But there were no signs that the accident had occurred there.

"A man doesn't use an anchor coming alongside a pier," a police lieutenant explained to Heinrich Reichert. "He makes fast with a line, a painter."

"You see no signs of anything but accident?" Richert demanded.

"What do you see, sir?" the lieutenant retorted and Reichert was silent.

Inquiry aboard Korndorf's swank fifty-five-foot motor cruiser failed to establish anything except that Korndorf had started out in the dinghy alone. It was unusual but nothing to worry about, the yacht's sailing master said. He could have taken the motor tender and a man if he had preferred. They had been trolling for sailfish out in the Stream when the broadcast of the affair at the station had come in. Mr. Korndorf, he said, had ordered the boat to Lake Worth.

"How is he related to you?" Rankin Dade asked Reichert.

"He is the son of my father's sister. A good-natured young man but he was of little account in business."

"A grandson of Dr. Bernhard Reichert?"

"Yes, a grandson, like myself and like me, a great admirer of the old gentleman."

"Any other grandsons?" Rankin Dade asked briskly.

"One other, Kurt Braun," Reichert said. He raised a hand wearily to his head and, of a sudden, scowled at Rankin. "You forget your job," he said. "It is to keep me alive, not to destroy me with endless questions."

"Questions could be part of the job," Rankin said.

"You are a guard, not a detective," Reichert said coldly. "It is not my family, it is I who are menaced by von Kleppner and his Nazi scum."

"Lay off Mr. Reichert," Bill Mulcay said severely to his brother dick. "He wants to be let alone, see, and that goes for you, too." His eyelid quivered beseechingly at Rankin Dade. "Don't ask questions about twenty bucks a day," the eyelid urged.

But though the rate was twenty a day it was at night that the two detectives earned their pay. Reichert, turning in, made it plain that one or the other of them must be continuously on watch about the house and patio till morning. He would lock his door. His windows were inaccessible without a ladder.

It was a tough night to stay awake, Bill said, after all the mental strain of being canned by old Finane, but in four-hour tricks they made it.

Rankin Dade stood the graveyard watch, from midnight till four. Bill Mulcay welcomed the sun with a yawn fit to sunburn his tonsils and walked down to the locked

iron gate to take in a morning paper. All over Page One the newspaper proclaimed Heinrich Reichert a hero for defying the Nazis and fighting to protect his grandfather. But Reichert was no hero to gummy-eyed Bill Mulcay just then. He was just one more guy who'd had a full night's sleep. And Reichert was still sleeping when Bill Mulcay turned out his partner at eight a. m. and handed him the newspaper.

Rankin Dade was in better case than Bill. He had used his four hours off in intensive sleep. He read the paper intently.

There was nothing new in the foreground of the case. But the newspaper filled in the background with much about Dr. Bernhard Reichert and the chemical business, established in his youth, that had survived the first World War and looked likely to survive this one, even though one section was solidly integrated in the Nazi economy, another in that of the U. S. A., and a third in South America.

Some wonder was expressed that Dr. Reichert had been anti-Nazi. He had straddled many issues in his time. His courage in going to Germany in spite of his ill health was stressed. But Heinrich Reichert was the Number One star. A brilliant young man, Heinrich Reichert, able to conduct his grandfather's multifarious business activities by telephone from a mansion in Palm Beach. There followed much breathless Sunday Supplement sensation about von Kleppner's reputed machinations as a propagandist. Why, the newspaper inquired editorially, wasn't something done about this bare-faced alien? It didn't mention what could be done.

Bill Mulcay opened a weary eye as Rankin Dade put down the newspaper and began shining up his eyeglasses.

"Now what happens, Navy?" he asked.

"Nothing," said Rankin. "Can't you feel it? We're on dead center—for a while. But I've got to find out where Scar Lip comes in. I have two dollars that says he's the lad who slugged our employer."

DEAD center it was. Reichert, waking late, denied himself to reporters and spent the morning basking in the sun in the patio. He read the newspaper with some attention and thanked them profusely for guarding him so well.

"A crack?" Bill Mulcay inquired of Rankin after the thanks.

Rankin shook his head.

"Sheer good humor," he said.

Reichert strolled into his study and stretched out on the Spanish leather couch to hear the noon news broadcast. A moment after the announcer had finished his advertising patter Reichert was sitting bolt upright on his couch with the eyes of the two detectives upon him.

"—and be sure to let us know if your drug store cannot supply you," said the announcer. "Berlin. An official spokesman said today that Dr. Bernhard Reichert had died this evening of a heart ailment shortly after being taken into custody by the Gestapo." Heinrich Reichert's face was contorted. Abruptly he sank down again, staring at the radio.

"Dr. Reichert was to have been questioned. His great chemical business here has been sequestrated. It was denied that he had been accompanied into Germany by his grandson, Kurt Braun. Braun, it was said, had stopped at the Spanish border three weeks ago when Dr. Reichert entered occupied France on his way to Berlin."

Heinrich Reichert turned his close set eyes on them with grim intensity. "Dead!" he said. "Dead! I have von Kleppner to thank for this! He notified the Nazis of my grandfather's secret mission. It was the shock, the realization that the concentration camp or the headsman's axe awaited him, that killed my grandfather! And these seizures of our property—he has ruined the family!"

He walked out of the room.

"Fast on their feet, these Nazis," Bill Mulcay muttered. "I hope this don't mean they've got our twenty a day. They don't miss much."

"They have that reputation," Rankin said. "We're off dead center now."

They followed Reichert. He turned on them. "I am going to my room alone," he said. "Listen to the broadcast. There may be more details."

There were no more details. When they went to his room they could hear the murmur of his voice on his private telephone line.

In a few minutes he came out. He wandered about the patio and the grounds outside it, as if in a daze. His eyes were on his feet. Bill whispered that he would have been a sitting shot, then, for any assassin. But, save for the clamor to heroize him further by newspapermen shut out by the iron gate at the foot of the driveway, Reichert was not disturbed that afternoon.

As Bill Mulcay saw it, it was his partner, Rankin Dade, who was disturbed. Rankin roved the house like an outraged ghost. He questioned the servants shamelessly about the Reicherts. They could tell him little, having been hired when Reichert rented the house. He sent out for more newspapers and hunted through them. He listened to every news broadcast.

He finally found something to hold him in a month-old magazine on Reichert's desk.

"Will war end the reign of the chemical king of two continents?" the article inquired, and went on to explain how the European fortune of Dr. Bernhard Reichert was threatened by covetous Nazi party men in Germany while, if war came, his American plants might be seized by the U. S. government.

It was illustrated by a picture of Dr. Reichert, "the chemical king, with his three grandsons, Heinrich Reichert, Kurt Braun and Sigismund Korndorf."

Rankin Dade looked at it casually; then stared, narrow-eyed. He shoved that picture close to Bill Mulcay's bored eyes.

"What kind of a tune does this play in your skull, Bill?" he asked. "The chunky black-eyed one that they call Kurt Braun I call Scar Lip."

CHAPTER VII

A MIDNIGHT TARGET

BILL MULCAY whistled. "I see it!" he said. "The Nazis grab old Reichert hard enough to stop his watch an' at the same time take his German plants. An' then all three grandsons converge on von Kleppner, the man who stole the dope an' put the finger on the old man. Our Grandson Heinrich gets slugged, Grandson Sigismund goes swimming with an anchor. An' Grandson Scar Lip, who's playin' 'em 'pretty close to his chest, goin' in for low visibility an' all——'"

"Go on."

"Well, he, when you catch him near von Kleppner's room an' he doesn't know who you're working for, he jumps two stories to get away fast. It's adding up."

"I think Scar Lip slugged Reichert," Rankin Dade said.

Bill looked around uneasily. "Maybe what Reichert needs in this joint is two truckloads of marines instead of just two dicks."

"We'll soon know," Rankin Dade said. Bill did not cheer up.

"To twenty dollars a day there is always a catch," he said with dismal conviction.

Rankin Dade nodded. "It isn't even funeral expenses," he agreed absently.

The approach of dusk, even though it was also the approach of dinner time, did not raise Bill's spirits. The two sawbucks were going to take more getting than ever that night, he muttered resentfully. The gravy eye watch from midnight to four a. m. was to be his that night.

Rankin Dade had been no company for him that long afternoon. Rankin was in a trance, a private one. And Heinrich

Reichert stayed in his room upstairs, four times at least answering the ring of his telephone—the one with the private number—and making murmured calls himself.

You couldn't hear what the guy was saying from the hall outside, Bill found.

Reichert improved things when he came out about five and invited his two guards to have a cocktail with him in the patio. It wasn't a pleasure party. Reichert waited until the old butler had tottered away and they leaned forward over his drink. When he was intense his narrow set eyes had a way of drawing closer together in his broad face.

"Von Kleppner has done his job for the Nazi party," he said. "Now, by telephone, he is blackmailing me. He wants ten thousand dollars."

"What's he got on you?" Bill Mulcay asked.

Reichert frowned. "He threatens to sell a lurid, blackening, fictitious story to the newspapers about the Reichert family."

"Too much money," said Rankin Dade. "Let him squall."

Reichert shook his head. "I must meet him." he said. "There are facts that could be twisted—things he found when he rifled my grandfather's file. I must see him. It is impossible for him to enter this place without being seen by watching reporters. That cannot be. But I will not go to any rendezvous of his choosing."

"Right!" said Bill.

"Therefore he has agreed to come by rowboat to my fishing boat at the pier."

He waved a hand toward Lake Worth. "I have said I will come down from my house alone, at eleven o'clock," he said. "But I want you both to follow me, at a cautious distance, and remain hidden within call until I leave the pier."

Rankin Dade cocked his head.

"You're taking a——" Bill began.

"I am not discussing this," Reichert broke in emphatically. "I am giving you instructions. There will be more later."

He finished his cocktail, jerked his head at them and returned to his room.

"I don't mind him risking his neck, Navy," Bill Mulcay said moodily. "But I don't like to see him kicking my sawbuck around reckless."

"Off center," said Rankin. "We're under way."

That night, after dining alone in his room, Reichert came out into the cool patio. Head down, arms folded behind his thick body, he roamed about the spacious courtyard in deep thought. Bill Mulcay's attempt to keep close to him brought an angry reproof.

"I will not be bothered to death to save my life," he said imperiously.

So, while the moon fought to break through the hurrying clouds and won recurring, temporary victories the two detectives sat in the patio listening to the splash of the fountain and watched the vague figure of their restless charge.

AT A quarter to eleven Reichert approached them. He took a small flashlight from his pocket and illumined the grass-bordered paving at their feet.

"I am starting to the boat," he said. "So that you may watch me I will use this torch. It will show von Kleppner, too, that I am coming without deception."

"You're sticking out your neck," Bill said dismally.

"He is too smart to try anything—now." Reichert frowned warningly. "It will be serious for me and final for you, if you permit him to suspect that you are following. You must remain far enough away so that you can see only the light of the torch. If you cannot see me he will not be able to see you."

He turned abruptly and walked diagonally across the patio toward the archway that led out in the direction of Lake Worth.

"Sometimes I could kill that guy at my own expense," Bill Mulcay said. "Well, ain't we going?"

"Slowly," said Rankin Dade. Not until

Reichert's gray flannel coat had ceased to be discernible against darker masses of flowers and foliage did they move.

By the time they had left the vaulted passage Reichert's light, glowing occasionally against shrubbery, was well ahead. It was all they had to guide them. The night was blowing briskly. The whisper of swaying bushes and the clash of the writhing palm fronds drowned out any sound of his movements.

The moon had succumbed to a solid cloud blanket but its silver glow, much diffused, took the edge off the blackness. At a slow pace they followed the flickering light.

Bill Mulcay strayed from the path, fell over a bush and cursed softly.

"Guard him with our lives we do, an' then he makes a midnight target of himself!" he grumbled. "Where is this blasted pier?"

"Not far, now," Rankin muttered. "You can see it against the black water, a bit to the left of Reichert's torch. Slow down! He's almost there, now."

A little farther on they paused. Reichert's torch showed more strongly. Its circle of radiance fell on the steps down to the pier.

At that same moment an orange-colored spot of light, much dimmer than the torch, winked on the outer end of the pier. Another flicker—and another—three quick spurts of flame! Three crashing blasts of a gun hit their ears. The flashlight dropped, went out.

The two detectives dug for their guns and broke into a run.

"I knew it!" Bill Mulcay gasped.

CHAPTER VIII

A CORPSE AND A LUGER

A HIGH-PITCHED cry followed the crack of the gun. It was Reichert's voice.

"Dade! Mulcay! Where—"

"Here!" Rankin cried. His flashlight leaped ahead of him as he ran.

"Huh!" Mulcay grunted in relief. "Run!" He pounded ahead harder after Rankin Dade. That urgest voice in the dark told Mulcay he still had his job—momentarily, anyhow. A hundred feet farther on they closed with a figure darting toward them. It was Reichert. He was hardly able to speak. Rankin Dade's torch, glancing over his plump but muscular body, fell upon no wound.

"Come!" panted Reichert. "Von Kleppner—he's killed—not me—but somebody he thought—was me!"

His voice rose to a shriek. "Somebody beside me—at the steps to the pier—beside me—in the dark!"

Already Rankin Dade had turned Reichert around. Now Rankin snapped off his torch. He shoved Mulcay meaningly against the faltering Reichert and led on toward the pier. He kept the torch in one hand, gun in the other, and he walked fast but softly.

His head was cocked as he strained his ears. His eyes, though darting to one side or the other in swift glances, kept raking the pier and Reichert's big motorboat, now vaguely visible alongside the outer end.

Nothing moved on the pier; nothing moved on the boat. Only the wind seemed alive in that velvety gray night.

Mulcay growled as he piloted their hard breathing client along. "Von will be beating it along the bank or inland," he said.

Rankin's hurrying foot hooked into something heavy. He stumbled, saved himself, swung around and flicked on his torch. The light sprayed on a man sprawled on his face.

"Cover me!" Rankin snapped at Bill Mulcay and bent down.

This thing he had stumbled over was the body of Scar Lip.

"It's Kurt!" Reichert gasped. "Kurt!" He grasped Rankin's arm. "My cousin, Kurt Braun! He went to Germany— No!

To Spain and now he's back—here in Palm Beach! Is he——?"

"Yes," said Rankin. "A bullet in the heart. Another along the ribs."

He stood up. Bill Mulcay's elbow hit him imperatively in the chest. Bill had been searching that dark landscape, eyes averted from the torch that might rob them of their keenest vision. Now he pointed.

"The boat," Bill muttered in Rankin's ear. "Somebody movin' on deck—I think!"

Rankin looked, squinting, waiting to pick up the movement.

"I don't understand this," Reichert cried at his elbow. "I came this far, openly, with my light showing. From the pier near the boat von Kleppner's voice challenged me. I know that voice. 'Is it you, Reichert?' he called and I answered, 'Yes!' "

He shuddered. "Then, at that same moment, I felt a man beside me." He pointed at the body. "This man, Kurt. He seemed to rise up out of the ground on my left. I started, and as I swung the torch around —bullets—shooting—from von Kleppner on the pier! Kurt dropped. I ran!"

The detectives paid little attention. Their eyes were probing the night around the fishing boat.

"Castin' off!" Bill Mulcay suggested in a whisper. "Maybe he can't find the right button—"

"Keep on talking," said Rankin to Reichert. He shoved his flashlight into the man's hand. "Talk—but keep that flashlight off us as we tackle the dock."

He bent into a crouch and descended the two steps to the low wooden pier. Bill Mulcay followed softly. Before Rankin had taken more than three strides the starter of the fishing boat churned into action. They saw that there was a widening gap between the motorboat and the pier. The breeze was blowing her out onto the Lake.

Rankin Dade charged.

"Start that motor and I'll shoot!" he shouted. His automatic was in his hand.

"Stop!" roared Reichert. He was close on Bill Mulcay's heels. The flashlight in his hands swept the water alongside the pier.

"A rowboat!" he cried. "Quick! He must not get away!"

The light picked out a few small boats tied to the ladder near the end of the pier. The noise of the starter in the drifting fishing cruiser was continuous now.

Rankin Dade fired a shot over the wheel. Then, of a sudden, he bent and caught up by the muzzle an automatic pistol that lay on the planking of the dock. It was a Luger.

He thrust it at Mulcay and scrambled down the ladder to the rowboat illumined by Reichert's torch.

"Put that Luger in your pocket," Rankin snapped at Mulcay. "It could be the one von Kleppner had in his kitbag. Get in!"

Reichert was climbing down the ladder, too, ahead of Mulcay. Rankin emitted a solitary syllable as he tore at the lubberly knot in the boat's painter. Reichert scrambled into the boat.

For a moment the motorboat's starter ceased whirring. Von Kleppner's voice came across the water:

"I warn you! Do not come near! I haf a gun!"

From the shoreward end of the pier came the drumming of feet. They turned that way. A voice, hailing:

"Wait, boys! Wait for the love o' God! Wait!"

"Finane!" said Mulcay. "How'd the old—"

Rankin Dade was on the rowing thwart, dropping an oar into the rowlock. His eyes stabbed across the water at the motorboat.

"Bring Finane—another boat!" he said and Mulcay jumped into the nearest.

Finane came tumbling down. The boat he hit shipped water, then righted herself.

"Is it von Kleppner ye're after?" he cried as both craft got clear.

"In that boat," said Rankin. He was rowing.

"He slipped me at the bridge—him an' his rowin' boat!" Finane cried across the water. "Row, Mulcay! I've been on his tail all day—till he steals a boat an' leaves me climbin' fences along the bank in the dark, the rat! We'll get him! I never quit! What's he done?"

In the leading boat Rankin Dade answered nothing. He was swinging the oars, digging them in and getting good way on the heavy boat. To make it harder, Reichert was in the bow.

Further out on the lake the motorboat, still dark, still powerless, drifted faster in the wind.

The starter had ceased whirring; the sound of the motor hatch being flung open reached their ears.

"Row!" snarled Reichert, in the bow. "He'll find the gas valve!"

Rankin, putting all his strength behind the oars, said no word. In the other boat Bill Mulcay, rowing erratically, gasped to Finane. "See if there's a nick along the top o' that Luger's barrel."

Finane, holding the Luger delicately, ran a finger along the barrel.

"There is," he said.

"The same gun!" Mulcay called to Rankin. "Von Kleppner's gun!" He thrashed away. "We've near—got him—right!"

Rankin's muscles were closing the gap. The starter whirred again. The motor opened with a roar, popped and cut off.

"Next time it will start!" Reichert moaned. "Pull, hund!"

Rankin did not vary the swing of his body. But the boat was surging along now. The white-sided motorboat was looming high in the black water. They were almost alongside. Rankin shipped his oars.

CHAPTER IX

IN PLACE OF PROOF

REICHERT leaped to his feet. He faced forward, raising his gun. His eyes peered over the rail into the cockpit at the dim figure of von Kleppner by the motor controls. With careful aim he fired.

Von Kleppner screamed. The starter ceased to whir.

Rankin Dade swung a long arm forward. He grabbed Reichert's coat and jerked him down into the bottom of the boat. Reichert's second shot went wild into the clouded sky.

Rankin Dade went over him into the cockpit of the motorboat. A moment later Finane and Mulcay piled after him. But there was no fight in von Kleppner when Rankin got a hand on him. Reichert's shot had struck him in the left shoulder scant inches above his heart. He faced them cursing and moaning. When Rankin switched on the cocklight von Kleppner's eyes blazed at Heinrich Reichert.

"That's good shootin'—from a small boat in the dark, Mr. Reichert, said Bill Mulcay with much respect.

Rankin Dade's voice was iron hard. "Good shooting," he said. "But not as good, Mr. Reichert, as your shot square into Kurt Braun's heart."

"What?" said Bill Mulcay. He jabbed an elbow urgently into Rankin's chest. "You mean von Kleppner's shot, Navy," he said. "With his Luger."

"Just the names ye've scrambled, Rankin, boy," Finane said hastily.

Rankin Dade's answer was to whip out a hand and twist the automatic from Heinrich Reichert. His move was quick and sure.

"I mean Reichert's shot," he said. "Reichert's! He killed his cousin."

There was a moment of silence in the boat.

"So?" said Reichert softly. "So?"

"We're all tired an' confused, like," said Finane. "It isn't you, sir—"

"I swear to you, gentlemen," said von Kleppner, "I have fired no shot this night." Sweat gleamed on his white forehead. "I was armed, true, for I feared that Reichert's invitation was a trap. But I was below, in the cabin, waiting for him accord-

ing to agreement, when three shots were fired on the pier."

He had placed his right hand behind him, supporting himself against the helmsman's seat. Now he drew it out into their sight.

There was a revolver in it, an old fashioned shooting iron of .38 calibre. He held it by the muzzle and handed it to Rankin Dade.

"No shots haf been fired," he said. "I bought that gun today."

"He did that," said Finane reluctantly. "With me watchin' behind a display o' seed packets."

Reichert ignored all this. He was still looking at Rankin Dade. "Tell me," he said with an overtone of mocking in his grave voice. "How could I kill Kurt Braun?"

"You killed Braun with two detectives guarding you and furnishing you with a perfect alibi," said Rankin Dade. "You met Braun by appointment somewhere on the path down to the pier and walked along with him. You handed him the flashlight at the steps to the pier and you went out on the pier. I suppose you told him you'd call von Kleppner to some three-sided parley. You walked out on the dock till you could just make out your dear cousin's white coat in the dark. And then, sure that we would think that you were the man with the flashlight and that von Kleppner was the man with the blazing gun, you let Kurt Braun have it with the Luger you stole last night from von Kleppner's bag in Room Three twenty-two."

Reichert shook his head. "Not good," he said. "How could you know I did all that?"

"Because first you killed your grandfather, with Nazi help, and that made it necessary for you to kill your cousin Sigismund Korndorf before he could carry out his threat to denounce you," Rankin said. "And then Kurt Braun had to go, too. There can be only one crown prince."

"Now I killed my grandfather," Reichert said suavely to the worried Finane.

Rankin Dade, too, turned to the agency head. "Who gave the Gestapo a chance to seize the old man?" he asked. "Was it the evidence in some alleged anti-Nazi letters that von Kleppner had absolutely no time to pass on to any Nazi of authority here to transmit to Germany? Or was it the cabled news stories of Heinrich Reichert's attack on von Kleppner and Heinrich Reichert's public admission that damning evidence against his grandfather existed? Who killed old Dr. Bernhard Reichert, four thousand miles away, as surely as if he had stabbed him?"

Finane gasped audibly.

"S-Satan!" said Bill Mulcay.

"I acted most courageously, most naturally, though perhaps unwisely in my anxiety," Reichert said. "You can't show anything else."

"I can't," said Rankin Dade. "But I don't need to."

Reichert laughed softly at that admission. "And you can't prove your wild charge that I killed Sig," he said.

"I can't," said Rankin Dade. "You were too smart for us all there. Just a blow to the jaw and a twist of rope around his leg when he came ashore last night to see you about betraying an old man, who, he knew, was no more anti-Nazi than you are. How could anybody prove you killed Korndorf? But I don't need to prove it."

REICHERT spoke with cold confidence: "You have already demonstrated that you cannot prove me guilty of shooting Kurt Braun. I have had enough of this nonsense. We will go ashore."

"He needs killin'," said Finane helplessly. "This shapes up!"

Rankin Dade laughed. It was a rasping sound. "One more thing I can't prove," he said. "I can't prove that von Kleppner killed you, Reichert, but that's what's going to happen—now! That's the one trick you overlooked. You'll die a newspaper hero and we three fumbling dicks

will catch hell for letting von Kleppner escape."

He looked at von Kleppner. "Right?"

"Right!" said von Kleppner. His voice was venomous. "He hass ruined me with —my friends. Never, gentlemen, haf I killed a man—it iss not my work. But this man—I will kill."

At once Rankin Dade thrust out to him the old revolver.

"Be careful where you point it—afterwards," he warned. "Once you're off this boat you're on your own. It's a deal."

Von Kleppner's hand was shaking with eagerness as he reached for the gun.

Reichert's glance was shooting from face to face. Leaden faces, the faces of those three hard-boiled dicks.

Von Kleppner raised the gun.

"No!" Reichert cried. "Wait! I will tell the truth! It is not what you think—not at all! I have a defense."

Rankin Dade's hand twitched the revolver from von Kleppner's clutching fingers. "I'll listen awhile," he said.

"It was Kurt's idea—to get the old man to go to Germany to try to save his plants from thieving Nazi officials, who were preparing to seize them," Reichert said in a torrent of words. "Kurt's! He forced me into a small share in that. It seemed that the old man would live forever, in spite of his bad heart. He outlived his sons and daughters and remained, a doddering old fool who would not let go of his business."

He paused. "So!" he said. "If we lost the old man with the German factories—I mean not by death but in a concentration camp, you understand—we would be content. He was impossible—a tyrant. Kurt took him, but he was careful not to go beyond the Spanish border. He did not trust me. He flew back by Clipper."

He nodded vehemently, turning from one to the other. Finane was troubled; Reichert saw that and fastened his eyes upon the old detective.

"Now I will prove to you my innocence of the murder of Sig Korndorf," he said. "I came upon Kurt Braun early last night down on the pier after he had—finished—with Sig Korndorf. The boat was already drifting away with Sig dead under it. He told me what he had done. I protested furiously. I was horrified. I feared he might kill me, too. That would shut my mouth and make him absolute master of the Reichert Chemical Industries."

He lowered his voice impressively. "He tried to kill me last night, while I was walking in the *patio,*" Reichert said.

The eyes of Finane and Bill Mulcay turned irresistibly upon Rankin Dade's face.

They remembered well that shot that Rankin Dade had fired over Reichert's head.

Rankin Dade spoke:

"If you are going to tell us that it was Kurt Braun who shot at you in the *patio*, be careful," he said. "One lie would show us your whole story of Braun murdering Sig Korndorf was false."

"I am not lying," Reichert said. "I swear to you Kurt did try to murder me. He crept close to me, unnoticed. Then he jumped up, within six feet of me. It was near the fountain. The moonlight was strong. I saw even the scar upon his lip. He laughed at me. He fired. The wind of the shot beat upon my right temple. He tried to fire again, as I stood there, paralyzed, but his pistol jammed. He cursed me, turned and ran. When I recovered I fired three shots after him."

In his desire to blacken Kurt Braun he had damned himself.

His voice was solemn as he looked from hardening face to hardening face. "May I die this moment, gentlemen, if every word I have spoken about this attack in the *patio* is not truth," he said. "He was a killer, gentlemen. I was nearly as close to death in that instant as poor Sig. But, until now, I have shielded Kurt."

"So you could kill him nice an' quiet, you shielded him, huh?" muttered Bill Mulcay. Rankin waited.

Reichert swung around on von Kleppner, leaning against the cockpit rail with his right hand against his wounded shoulder. He was a most disheveled, undignified blackmailer now.

"And he—von Kleppner, h e r e—clubbed me in the garden a few minutes later," Reichert charged with vicious certainty. "I saw him, too. He thought he had killed me."

"No!" said von Kleppner weakly. "Gentlemen, you will not belief me but I deal in propaganda, not——"

"And he would have killed me if he had had time to put a light on my head before he was forced to run when the servants came," Reichert declared. "As for tonight, I tell you I killed Kurt Braun in self-defense, before he could kill me! No jury would convict me!"

"You never saw a jury work on a rotten egg," said Rankin Dade. "You'll be tried for the murder of Kurt Braun. I know he was no master crook; he was just sneaking around, watching the game, finding out what he could and finally declaring himself in by slugging you in the garden. You'll be tried for his murder but what the jury will give you the chair for is the murder of your grandfather."

Joachim von Kleppner spoke, weakly triumphant:

"And in that part of the case I can be of assistance. For I swear, and prove it by two letters, that it was Heinrich Reichert who invited me to his house for a week. Reichert was the mind, the only mind, behind these crimes. I was an unknowing dupe in this dirty plan to get rid of old Dr. Reichert—only a dupe! But I——"

Like an uncoiling spring Reichert swung around and lunged at him. Three hands grabbed at Reichert's bulky, fast moving figure but no grip held against the venomous impetuosity of his charge. He hit von Kleppner hard, knocking him over the rail, and his arms tightened around the older man as they splashed into the black water.

They went down, deep, and no phosphorescence marked their struggle under the rippling surface of the lake.

"I knew that soft twenty bucks a day wouldn't last," Bill Mulcay said thickly.

IT WAS a tough ending to a tough night, that search till dawn for the bodies of the two men. Though the police finally took over the job with dragging equipment it wasn't until twenty-four hours later that the interlocked bodies were found close to the inlet. And then, as Bill Mulcay observed, there was only just enough left to identify them.

But as the three tired detectives gave over that long search as the sun came up over Palm Beach, Francis Finane said to Rankin Dade:

"Look, boy there's always a starting point in any case. When did you get onto Reichert in the first place?"

"Just before he beat up von Kleppner at the railroad station," Rankin Dade said.

Finane raised his eyebrows.

Rankin Dade stared back at the old man. "We were looking for some papers you told me von Kleppner had stolen," Rankin said coldly. "When I couldn't find them I knew they didn't exist. That explained Reichert to me. I got cursed out and fired from my job. But I kept right on working on the case until I could make even you know those papers didn't exist. You know, now."

"We never quit, see?" Bill Mulcay said smugly.

Francis Finane turned on him, scowling horribly. "One more word out o' you, flatfoot, and ye will have quit Finane Protective Service by request—my request."

His scowl took in Rankin Dade, obliquely. "Ye're as big a curse to me, Bill Mulcay, as I have no doubt your four-eyed partner will be to Naval Intelligence as soon as I pass the word to Washington that he sees further through a brick wall than some."

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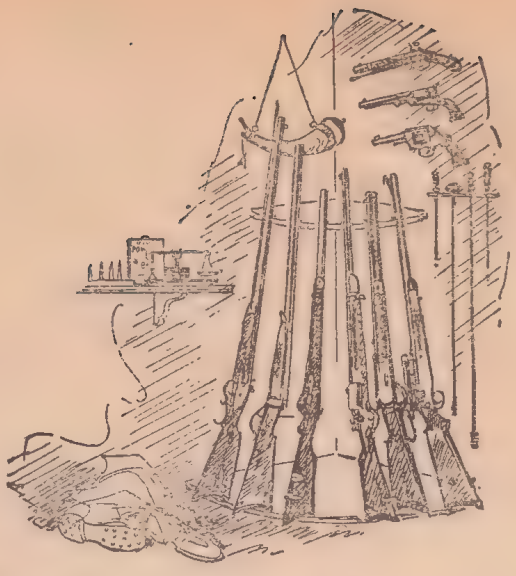

Second- or Third-hand Guns

YOU want to get a gun? You say you went down to see your local gun dealer at the hardware store? He said, "Sorry, I just haven't got a new gun in the store—not a thing was delivered on my last order—no tellin' when I'll have anything in—but say, I've got a used rifle here that is just about what you're looking for—it looks kinda bad on the outside, but it hasn't been fired more'n twenty times—and the dadburned thing shoots where you look. Now I can let you have it at a bargain, etc. etc."

Well, sir, there's no question about there being a shortage of sporting firearms, not only due to the fact that most all the gun people are working for the government, but also due to the present abnormal demand. Auxiliary police, various defense organizations, and the individual civilian arming himself have all contributed to the drain on the gun market, both new and used.

Personally, I don't have a lot of faith in used guns. But when there is nothing else to be had, a used gun is of course better than no gun. Don't get the idea that it is impossible to get a good used gun, you just have to be mighty careful.

First of all never buy a gun "sight unseen," and if possible be sure and try it out—after making the following so-called tests.

Never buy a gun of obsolete design or one chambered for an obsolete cartridge.

Don't buy a gun that is a wreck on the outside. If the outside has been abused or not taken care of the chances are a hundred to one that the inside has been neglected. On the other hand a fine looking gun can be a lemon as far as shooting is concerned.

If you find a gun that looks good, push a tight-fitting patch or clean rag through the bore, this is important because a film of oil in a lousy barrel will make it look pretty good. Now point the gun toward a piece of white cloth under a good light and carefully examine the bore. Don't point the gun at a source of light because you will get a glare which will cover up defects. If the bore looks rough or has rust pits look for another gun.

If the bore is clean (no pits or roughness) and the lands are nice and sharp, and you notice no tight or loose spots as you push the patch through the bore, the barrel is in all probability okay.

Now take a good look at the action. Be sure the gun is unloaded and cock it. If a bolt action, push on the striker and yank it up and down. If lever action push on the hammer. If you can push it off cock the gun is dangerous—so have nothing to

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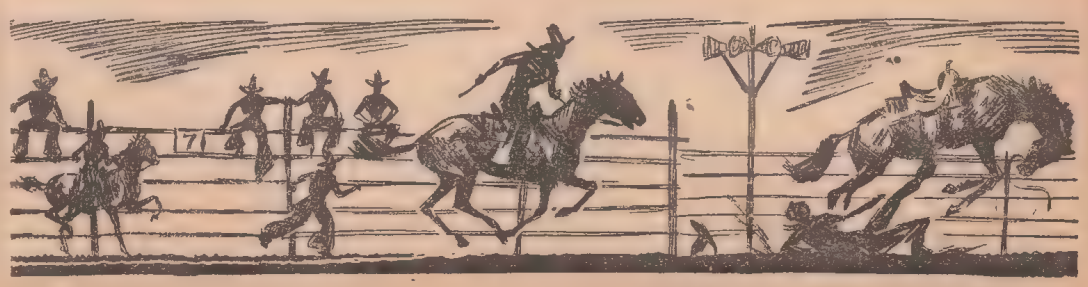

do with it. Repairs could no doubt be made, but repairs run into heavy dough and anyway, it's hard to find a good gunsmith these days.

If the gun is bolt action you can tell if it has extreme head-space (looseness between the bolt and the head of the cartridge. This is a very dangerous condition) by inserting a new empty cartridge case in the chamber, completely closing the bolt and examining for tight fit—if you can move the bolt back and forth—give it up! It's a lot safer to check with a headspace

gauge, which is a precision made gadget the shape of a cartridge and made of glass-hard steel. A good gunsmith will have a set of gauges.

The same applies to lever-action rifles. If the lever is very loose the gun is no doubt badly worn. Try to move the bolt mechanism—the part that moves back when the fired cartridge case is tossed out—if it is loose there might be excessive headspace.

Maybe you don't know what happens when there is excessive headspace in a gun? As the powder explodes the cartridge case clings to the walls of the chamber. If the bolt doesn't support the base of the cartridge the head or rear end will stretch until supported. If the stretch is too great the case will rupture and gas under high pressure together with particles of brass will blow back into the action, in some cases tearing up the action to say nothing of the shooter's face.

Don't buy a gun that is in need of repairs. Parts are hard to get from the factory and making them by hand runs into real money.

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I almost forgot about sights. A good gun should be equipped with good sights. Check them thoroughly. If they are bent or adjusted erratically, pass the gun by. Good new sights are expensive and hard to get. A receiver or tang peep sight is the only kind to have on the rear. The front sight should be of the post type unless you intend to use the gun for target work only, in which case you might prefer the aperture type.

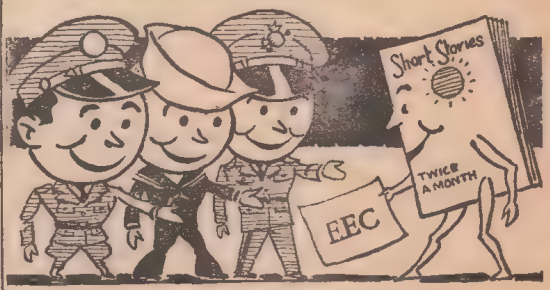
If you can get the gun on approval—so much the better—take it home, clean it carefully and look for worn parts. Try it out for accuracy. Check the fired case for excessive expansion and gas leakage around the primer.

A number of readers have written asking if I can tell them where they can get such and such gun at a reasonable price. Unfortunately I don't have available the time that would be necessary to follow the used gun market. So am unable to give any information as to the whereabouts of various used guns. Wish I could.

A lot of fun and pleasure can be had using a good gun—a poor gun is a headache, sometimes fatal!

ENDS OF THE EARTH CLUB

United Services Department



With the Armed Forces in B. W. I.

Dear Secretary:

I am a member of the U. S. Air Corps, and am now stationed in the British West Indies. Before coming here I was at Bo-

rinquen Field, Puerto Rico, and Langley Field, Va. Since I have done quite a bit of traveling, I feel confident that I am fully qualified to be a member of your Club.

Hoping I am accepted into your club I remain,

Yours truly,
Pfc. Joseph W. Barber.

35th Bombardment Squadron (H),
A. P. O. 806,
Antigua Base Command, Antigua, B. W. I.
Via San Juan, P. R.
Army Bomber.

For Medical Corps Members

Dear Secretary:

Would you please enroll me in the Ends of the Earth Club? I have read SHORT STORIES before entering the Army, but being busy these last few months, my reading time is limited. Your club interests me—believe me it's darned nice to be able to get in touch with your fellow soldiers and tell each other our experiences. I am a medical man attached to this squadron. I'd like to hear from men in the medical corps.

Yours truly,
Pvt. Edward J. Ferris.

3rd Observation Squadron,
Langley Field, Va.

Paging Mr. J. Sanoran

We are in receipt of a communication from a Mr. Arthur Parkinson, who is a prisoner of war in Germany, addressed to Mr. J. Sanoran (or Sanorby), in our care. Following is the message:

Dear Sanoran and Friends: Things out here are still going O.K., but a P.O.W. life is inclined to be rather tiring at times. I am now working on a farm, which does help to pass the time away decently. Wishing you and the Ends of the Earth Club all the best— Yours,

Parkinson.

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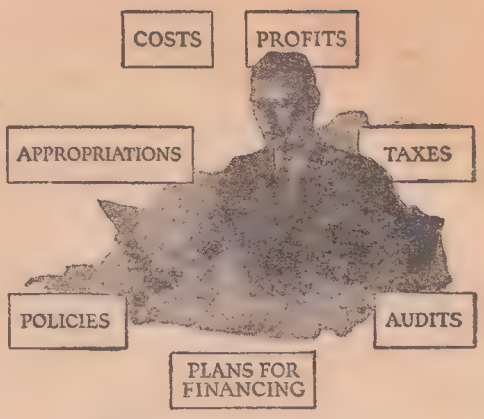

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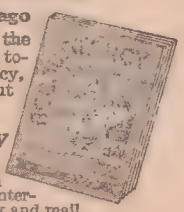

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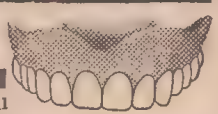

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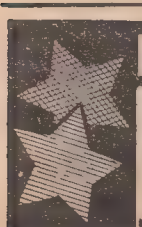

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ENDS OF THE EARTH CLUB MEMBERS

WITH hundreds of letters from new members coming in every day, it is obviously impossible to print all of them in the columns of the magazine. The editors do the best they can, but naturally most readers buy SHORT STORIES *because of the fiction that it contains. Below are more names and addresses of Ends of the Earth Club members. Most of these members will be eager to hear from you, should you care to correspond with them, and will be glad to reply. Note these lists, if you are interested in writing to other members. Names and addresses will appear only once.*

John A. Abersold, 748th Ord. Co., Avn. A. B., Elmendorf Field, Alaska.
Geo. W. Alex (Pvt. 1st Cl.), H.. & S., 3rd-6th Def. B., c/o Postmaster, San Francisco, Calif.
Wm. Anceravige, 2479 Bedford Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.
Pvt. Alfred Anderson, U.S.M.C.R., 1st Marine Brigade (Prov.), Iceland, c/o Postmaster, N. Y. City.
Larisi A. Bello, c/o Y. A. Ishola, Marine Dept., Port Harcourt, Nigeria, W. Africa.
A. C. Bobby, H.Q. 57, U. S. Army, Fort McKinley, Rizal, P. I.
Pvt. Norman M. Briggs, Hq. Btry., 1st Bn. 206, Fort Mears, Alaska.
Leonard Broder, 824 E. 181st St., Bronx, N. Y.
Everett S. Brown, 101 N. Maryland Ave., Wilmington, Del.
Letha Brown, Baldwin, La.
Corp. J. F. Brumbaugh, Co. C, 22nd Inf. (P.M.D.), 4th Prov. Mtzd. Div., Fort Benning, Ga.
Pfc. A. V. Bryan, 6-G-Dc., U. S. M. C., Midway Island, North Pacific Ocean.
P. Button, 1146 Richardson St., Victoria, B. C., Canada.
Sidney H. Byrd, L. B. 516, Allen, South Dakota.
Earl K. Carpenter, Aircraft Warning Co., Ft. McKinley, Rizal, P. I.
Allene Casavant, 101 St. Louis St., St. Johns, Que., Canada.
R. D. Casey, P. O. Box 125, Lawrence, N. Y.
I. I. Chiehiuka, St. Mark's Church, Abalamabie, Bonny, Nigeria, W. Africa.
Michael Churley, 48 Greenwich St., New York, N. Y.
D. Claeys, East Devine St., Gen. Del., Sarnia, Ont., Canada.
J. W. Clark, 2318 Lincoln Ave., Chicago, Ill.
Walter B. Coker, 1 Pademha Rd., Sierra Leone, B. W. A.
Charles Cook, 1102 S. Pacific St., Oceanside, Calif.
Ronald A. Cook, 325 S. Walnut St., Lansing, Mich.
V. M. Cottone, La Lima, Honduras, Central America (Tela. Railroad Co., Eng. Dept.).
R. Cox, Gold Hill, Oregon (Star Route).
Robert E. Crosby, 709 Pecan St., Del Rio, Texas.
Philip Demetres, 124 Veronica Pl., Brooklyn, N. Y.
Robert Doane, Central Alta Sanatorium, Calgary, Alta., Canada.
V. L. Doss, Navy Yard Dispensary, Portsmouth, Va.
Chauncey W. Edgar, 1113 Edgar St., Rahway, N. J.
Clenio W. Duarte, Praia de Botafogo, 158 Apt. 7, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
Al. Edwards, 94 Albert St., Rosettenville, Johannesburg, South Africa.
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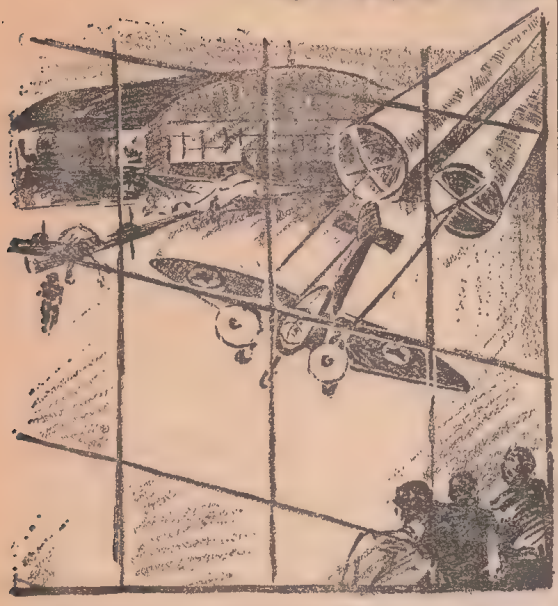


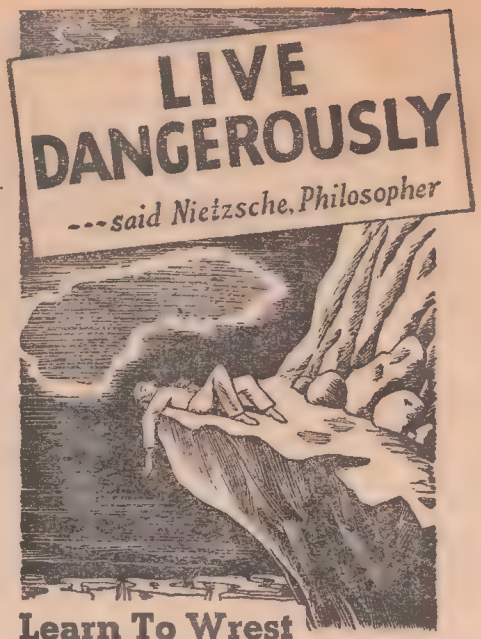
Maybe the Surprise Will Kill 'Em

WHEN Loose Lip looked out a window on Federal Proving ground on that epic December day, this is about what he saw—as in the Caffrey story in this issue, *The Raid They Stopped*. What he said, as set down by Caffrey, was as follows:

You guys here on Federal Provin' Ground sure do take lotsa showin'. Hell's bells. Ya're like the farmer that gets his first squint at that there circus ge-raffe an' sez they ain't no such animal.

Lotsa you gents was out on the apron when Trump first brings in his Bushmaster squadron an' takes time out to show test jus' how them Orr air anchors do their stuff. Ya saw him come down in that dive, drop out his two lines o' wet wash an' flag that Bushmaster down to a crawl. An' still ya want to argue that the Orr air anchors *can't be*—jus' 'cause it's somethin' new. . . . Say, as long as they's guys like ol' Bill Orr in this flyin' business, they'll be plenty new stuff.

An' why shouldn't this air anchor be the nuts? You guys know what happens when a ship pulls a tow target behind it. . . . Yeah, ya're correct as hell—it slows down the tow-target ship's speed by 'bout five miles per hour. So what happens when ya drop out two lines o' tow-target cones? Are ya



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gonna slow down that ship? Don't tell me! I know. I wuz there, brother. I wuz there!

Sure, like I say, these Orr anchor cones is onny so many tow-target cones, improved on so's they're a hell of a lot stouter, an' can be c'lapsed.

Then this thing o' turnin' a ship by usin' jus' one o' the air anchors. Gee, gang, iffn all you dopes wasn't kicked outa secon' grade, when ya wuz kids, Old Man Lock's super-dump son wouldn't have to be spendin' Uncle Sam's valuable time tryin' to 'spain that now. . . .

Look. You guys know that a pilot can turn any fast pursuit job by jus' shovin' one hand out into the slipstream. Is that right? Sure. I answer me own questions. Well, if a hand shoved overside will turn a ship, what-a-hell do ya guess happens when one of them howlin' clothes-lines drags down on jus' one side of a ship that's doin' up'erds o' three hundreds per?

She do turn! An' how. Gee, gang, I'm here to tell that them Bushmasters turn on nothin' flat . . . then come back to snap at the anchors. Sure. Us, like a pup tryin' to bite his tail.

But why argue! It had to come. Guys like Bill Orr always argued that hit-an-'run air fire wuz no dice, an' that this air arm'd onny be a weak finger till some guy thunk up something approachin' position fire-control for air. Gee, I'm not supposed to tell nothin' 'bout the raid they stopped—that there Trump Bushmaster outfit, I mean—but you timed-slow guys can gather for yourself that somethin' musta happened to the Focke-Wulf outfit that European flashes said was comin' this way. They never arrived, did they? . . . Dam' tootin', they didn't!

But I can't say no more. Like all the big shots in this war—I'm swore to secrecy. An' when I'm swore to secrecy, what I mean, I keep it. . . . Helf, fer weeks at a time, I don't even tell me landlady when she's gonna get the back-room rent.

An' say—that goes for a whole china-potful of new gadgets that your old Uncle Sam is sittin' on. No, sir, the old boy ain't tellin' nobody—not even big shots like Major Trump, Cap Call an' me—what he's hidin'. So don't let a little thing like Orr air anchors bug ya eyes, 'cause ya gonna see stuff that'll raise ya hackles an' make ya heads swim. . . . Gee, but I've gotta be shakin' a leg. I'm the guy that Uncle Sam's payin' for *what* he knows—not *who* he knows. Yes, sir, gang, Old Man Lock's best gift to nat'nal preparedness is gonna wear a "IN WORK" sign till the rest o' them boys like Captain Colin Kelly have time to knock down the last pair of them yeller pig ears. . . . An', boy! what a day she'll be!

Quite chatty, old Loose Lip—and we are with him all the way. One sure way to win this war is for everyone to wear an "in work" sign, and to get on with it. Our work is to get together fiction that a fighting nation will like to read—and we are

going at it as hard as we know how—by land, sea, air and typewriter.

When Rabbits Eat Pickles

I AM very glad that you are using *The Flaming Gods,* writes Maria Coughlan about the novelette in this issue. The story happens during the Russian-Turkish war (1877-78).

I got some of my local color first while lecturing on Caucasus. It was then that I saw the temple of fire worshippers, near the city of Baku. It's four towers spouting flame made an unforgettable impression.

When I was a newspaper correspondent during the first World War, I saw Caucasus still untamed. Some of the mountaineer tribes still swear allegiance to the ghost of their famous rebel Shamil. Their fascinating customs gave me material for many stories. In *The Flaming Gods,* one of the heroes is fashioned after Ted Coughlan, who writes mostly humor and detective stories. He supplied the military details for the story. He should know a lot about soldiering, because he volunteered with the British army during the World War, and fought with them for four years. I am a rather peaceful person myself, although I spent most of my life in Russia, and was involved in wars and revolutions. Environment pushes you into those things. Russians say: "Rabbit will eat pickles if beaten hard enough."

Maria (Moravsky) Coughlan

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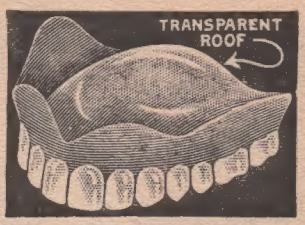

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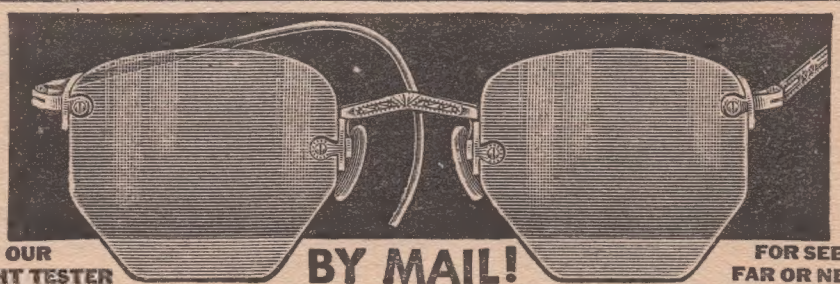

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